D2 Youth: Improving Educational and Economic Outcomes for Disconnected and Disengaging Youth

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Educational attainment is a key determinant of workforce success, and a strong workforce drives economic growth and stability. Promoting important educational outcomes and successful transitions to the labor market is a goal pursued at the national, state, and local levels by educators, elected officials, businesses and employers, parents, and others who make up the fabric of our communities (Abbott, 2014). High school dropouts have fewer employment opportunities, a much lower earning potential, and also experience higher rates of incarceration and health problems. They are more likely to rely on public assistance and to live for extended periods of time in poverty than high school graduates. A high school diploma is the minimum standard for an individual's full participation in a growing global marketplace. Students who make the decision to leave school before completing a high school diploma lose a lifetime of employment and educational opportunities. Our country's economic well-being is dependent upon an educated citizenry, beginning with the minimum of a high school diploma (d'Entremont and Jampol, 2012).

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Chart Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2008-2012 American Community Survey

Opportunity Youth

In 2012 The White House Council for Community Solutions used the descriptor "opportunity youth" referring to youth ages sixteen to twenty-four who are not in school or working (Stonesifer, et al., 2012). The D2 Center | Directions & Diploma, an emerging nonprofit in Omaha, Nebraska, views youth who have disconnected from school, are disengaging from school, or are off-track to graduate from high school on time as directions and diploma youth or "D2 youth." Youth ages fifteen to twenty-one, who may be out of school, in alternative education, or disconnecting from a traditional high school are at risk of not graduating; they need to change their life trajectory and seek new opportunities and directions to
ensure that they earn a high school diploma and plan for their futures beyond high school. Some D2 youth have already become opportunity youth while others are on the brink of complete disengagement. To these youth the road to a diploma may seem like a long and twisted one filled with uncertainty and insurmountable obstacles along the way. For teen parents the road can impact not only their own educational attainment but also the future educational attainment level of their children. The correlation between young people’s education and that of their parents has changed little if at all since 1930 (Duncan and Murnane, 2011). For teen parents who have dropped out of school, investing in support systems and programs that can change the trajectory of their educational pathway may have as great an impact as investing in early childhood education.

D2 youth have the potential to become an economic asset as opposed to a liability – to play a positive role as citizens in local communities and in the national economy. The potential and opportunity that lie within each individual student, especially those students who have not had traditional success in school, need to be realized. Education is an economic engine; thus, a lost opportunity to engage or keep D2 youth engaged may result in a negative economic impact in the community. It is time to change directions and the mindset of the twentieth century – from discarding or forgetting disconnected youth to embracing the opportunity to engage these youth and renew their focus on finding pathways to success.

A High School Diploma or a GED?

Twentieth century thinking focused on promoting the General Education Development (GED) certificate for disengaged students. This was regarded as the "ticket" out of traditional high schools and was considered easier than completing a high school degree. Today, the pathway to opportunity begins with a high school diploma. Most states provide funding to schools for students at least up to the age of twenty-one, affording youth additional time to graduate. The economic benefits of a high school diploma are significant. High school graduates enroll and complete postsecondary education at a significantly higher rate than students who have dropped out or disconnected from high school or have completed a GED. Individuals with traditional diplomas outperform GED certificate recipients with respect to employment, earnings, and other labor market outcomes. For many employers (as well as the military), a GED disqualifies job seekers from consideration. Even students who graduate from high school in more than four years are more likely than GED recipients to complete a postsecondary degree and maintain a full-time job. For dropouts, a GED is better than nothing, but to maximize benefits to the students and their communities, completing a high school diploma is by far the better choice (Balfanz and Fox, 2009).

Education Is the Economic Engine of the United States

National Perspective

High school dropouts slow the economic engine of the U.S. The financial consequences of not earning a high school diploma are severe. More than 17% of adult high school dropouts are unemployed and the
economic prospects for dropouts are likely to worsen as the skill requirements continue to rise for future jobs. Forty years ago, a high school dropout could easily find work, but today many low-skill jobs have been automated or sent overseas. As required skill levels continue to rise, dropouts are falling further behind. More than two-thirds of the jobs in the U.S. workforce in 2018 will require not only a high school diploma, but also some postsecondary education (Reyna, 2011).

The economic costs of opportunity youth are significant across the social spectrum. People who lack labor market skills and an education are at risk of poorer economic, social, and personal outcomes. The burden falls not only on the youth themselves in the present and over their entire life course, but also on society and taxpayers (Belfield, Levin and Rosen, 2012). Dropouts are more than twice as likely as high school graduates to slip into poverty in a single year. As dropouts search for work, they often turn to the state for unemployment benefits, public assistance, temporary cash payments, food stamps, and healthcare. Dropouts are eight times more likely to be in jail or in prison than are high school graduates resulting in a significant cost to states and local entities (Balfanz and Fox, 2009).

Two of the ways Belfield, Levin and Rosen (2012) examine the economic impact of opportunity youth are relative to the loss of potential earnings of the youth annually or over a lifetime, and the loss of tax revenue and the economic burden on taxpayers referred to as the taxpayer burden. One of the main economic consequences is the loss of earnings of the youth themselves as illustrated in the graph below. The other main consequence is the associated loss of tax revenue that would have been generated by these youth. This revenue loss combined with additional public health care paid by taxpayers, the costs of the criminal justice system and corrections, and welfare and social services payments comprise the main elements of the taxpayer burden. Considering the economic impact over a lifetime of one cohort of 6.7 million opportunity youth ages sixteen to twenty-four, the aggregate taxpayer burden amounts to $1.56 trillion (Belfield, Levin and Rosen, 2012).

College graduates earn on average **one million more** over a lifetime than do high school dropouts. In other words, dropping out has the potential to be a million-dollar mistake. By using the average salary over an assumed work "lifetime" of forty years, the college graduate will earn more than $1 million compared to a high school dropout. Higher levels of education equate to significantly higher levels of annual earnings.

*Chart Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2008-2012 American Community Survey*

The most important family factor in a study of income inequality is the parents’ incomes, and the most important family factor in an educational attainment study is the parents’ education. Unfortunately, the
trend of downward mobility is increasing. In the past decade, 18 percent of men and 13 percent of women finished their schooling with less education than their fathers or mothers (Duncan and Murnane, 2011). Research shows that high school graduates live longer; raise healthier, better educated children; and are less likely to commit crimes, be teen parents, or rely on government healthcare or other public assistance programs. The U.S. will benefit from graduates' increased purchasing power, stronger levels of productivity in the workforce, and the collection of more taxes (Balfanz and Fox, 2009).

Levin and Rouse (2012) report that when the costs of investment to produce a new graduate are taken into account, there is a return of $1.45 to $3.55 for every dollar of investment, depending upon the educational intervention strategy. It is imperative that communities create an integrated system of strategies and programs that address the multitude of unique needs of youth who have dropped out or disengaged. The investment in these strategies and programs will benefit not only the lifetime earning potential of the youth but will reduce the burden on the taxpayer.

**Nebraska Perspective**

The negative economic impact of opportunity youth is a reality in Nebraska. For the purposes of an economic analysis, the dropout data from the 2013 *Kids Count in Nebraska Report* is used together with the annual earnings data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) and the taxpayer burden data from Belfield, Levin and Rosen (2012). The lost earnings over a working lifetime (age twenty-five through age sixty-five) for one high school dropout would be $318,600 or $7,965 per year compared to a high school graduate who receives no further education. Those numbers nearly double if the youth were to complete an Associate’s Degree. The taxpayer burden over a working lifetime for one dropout would be $148,790 or $3,720 per year. These figures do not take into account many additional costs to individuals or society including but not limited to: lost earnings and the taxpayer burden for youth between the ages of 16 and 24, the costs for victims of crime, and private health insurance expenditures.

**Lost Earnings**

1,988 Nebraska Dropouts

- **Annual**: $15,834,420
- **Lifetime**: $633,376,800

**Taxpayer Burden**

1,988 Nebraska Dropouts

- **Annual**: $7,395,360
- **Lifetime**: $295,814,400

*Voices for Children in Nebraska (2013); U.S. Census Bureau (2012), Belfield, Levin and Rosen (2012)*

The good news in the data: The emphasis on improving graduation rates in Nebraska is clearly having an impact on reducing the dropout rate. According to the *2008 Kids Count in Nebraska Report*, 2,377
students dropped out of school in 2007 compared to 1,988 students who dropped out in 2012. However, the dropout rate and other statistics associated with youth at risk of dropping out still reflect a staggering economic impact for the state of Nebraska. This illustrates the importance of continued focus on dropout prevention programs and on creative, non-traditional programs that reengage youth who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out. If funding from public and private partnerships focuses on the collective impact of reengaging youth, the increase in earnings and decrease in taxpayer burden would generate resources to be reallocated to other needs and priorities in Nebraska. If for no other reason than the economic impact, investing in D2 youth should be a priority in Nebraska today.

In Metro Omaha

The economic consequences alone are a strong enough rationale to develop a more targeted approach to the efforts of dropout prevention and reengagement in the metro Omaha community. If school district and community resources are better aligned, the result may not only be an ongoing increase in graduation rates over the next five years, but also a greater number of young adults who are in postsecondary education and training programs or are employed in full-time, living wage jobs.

The following graphic reflects the potential economic impact for the metro Omaha area (Douglas and Sarpy counties), based on the same data sources:

- **Lost Earnings**: $7,272,045 (Annual) + $290,881,800 (Lifetime)
- **Taxpayer Burden**: $3,396,360 (Annual) + $135,854,400 (Lifetime)

This economic impact should not be overlooked in the national discussion regarding educational reform and student achievement. Finding solutions to the economic burden associated with youth who have disengaged or dropped out of school should be a national, state, and local priority. The solution should be two-fold: a realistic pathway and support system for completing a high school diploma and a career direction guided by individual interests and strengths. The D2 Center model utilizes education and a dynamic system of supports to move youth from a series of lifelong lost economic opportunities toward lifelong economic gains, beginning with a high school diploma.
The D2 Center: A Model for Changing Educational and Economic Outcomes for High Risk Youth

Introduction

Finding, engaging, and supporting D2 youth is a year-round activity rather than an annual or semi-annual event. Very few high school students who have transitioned from a traditional high school to an alternative setting ever return to a traditional high school once they leave, and a majority of all dropouts' last school placement is an alternative setting. A school district with a significant population of students who have dropped out or transitioned to alternative education may not have all the resources needed to reengage these students and get them back or keep them on track to graduation. More intensive supports are needed to help D2 youth not only earn their diploma over a period of months or years, but also to plan and prepare for postsecondary education, training, and a career. Community resources and partnerships need to be aligned, targeted, and strengthened to support the difficult and complex work of reengagement and support of high-risk youth. Lessons learned from other communities show that buy-in from multiple levels of governmental and non-governmental partners is needed to forge programs, services, and partnerships to maximize opportunities for success at the high school and postsecondary levels.

More than a passing intervention is required to engage or keep D2 youth engaged for long-term success. Funding streams supporting opportunity youth are not as effective long term when they end in a few months or a year and are not well connected to others and the next level of service. Youth need strong, up-front case management that links them to essential services. "One stop shops" or reengagement centers have been expanding and showing great promise across the country. They can become central hubs of trusted information for youth who are off track or wanting to reconnect (Abbott 2014).

Positive adult relationships and good role models are especially important for youth to persist in a program of support. Unfortunately, the siloed nature of many youth programs may be difficult for youth to understand and utilize effectively. A trusted adult can help youth navigate the process of applying for services and supports. They need honest, straightforward sources of information to make decisions about their future. Many programs across the country struggle to maintain comprehensive case management systems due to funding. To further complicate the issue, some governmental and other grant funders reward quantity of youth served, rather than quality (Abbott 2014).

Reengaging D2 Youth in Omaha

Small, positive steps can mean big returns for youth in Omaha who are on a pathway to long-term unemployment, underemployment, jail or prison time, and being on public assistance rather than being productive, tax-paying citizens. Although committing resources to D2 youth involves risk-taking for those willing to support them, the results can have significant benefits for families and society. A primary conclusion of a recent survey of high school dropouts is that "Students who leave school before
graduating are often struggling with overwhelming life circumstances.... Students leave school not because of a particular event or factor, but because circumstances accumulate in ways that push school further and further down their list of priorities" (Zaff and Jones, 2014). With many of these youth the issues affecting their lack of success are so varied and complex that the solutions tend to come in smaller steps rather than in leaps and bounds. If resources in the community are aligned to target these youth, opportunities for success will create a win-win situation for all—the youth, the school district, partners working together to assist the youth, and the community as a whole.

The National League of Cities has become a positive force in the development of reengagement centers, such as the D2 Center, around the country. In the National League of Cities Municipal Action Guide for Reconnecting Youth through Dropout Reengagement Centers (2013), five critical strategies were outlined that have served as a foundation for planning, development, and ongoing implementation at the D2 Center:

- Highlight dropout reengagement as a necessary complement to dropout prevention.
- Frame the "dropout pool" as a community problem — not simply a school district problem.
- Develop an effective messaging and communication strategy that keeps dropout reengagement in the public eye.
- Focus dropout reengagement on preparation for the workforce as well as high school completion.
- Embrace a cross-system approach.

The mission of the D2 Center is to connect out-of-school and disengaged youth ages fifteen to twenty-one into an educational pathway with other resources and supports needed to earn a high school diploma and prepare for postsecondary opportunities and a career. The goals of the D2 Center are critical to the success of every student served:

- Support each youth in completing a high school diploma — creatively, consistently and collaboratively.
- Equip youth with a future plan and pathway to their personal success and well-being.
- Convince youth that the best strategy for success in life is to "invest in yourself."

By listening to students, the D2 Center has delved into the reasons why students have dropped out or become disengaged. Many students have identified multiple reasons for dropping out and disconnecting. Typically, the responses fall into two categories; school-related reasons or personal/social/emotional reasons.

**School-Related Reasons:**

- Disinterested/bored with school
- Missed too many days and could not catch up
- Failing classes
- Behavioral: did not get along with teachers and/or classmates
- School was too hard; learning problems
- Felt unsafe in school or going to/from school (includes bullying)

**Personal/Social/Emotional Reasons:**
- Influenced by people uninterested in school
- Personal mental/behavioral health problems
- Family issues; problems in home environment
- Transportation issues
- Pregnant/parenting; childcare issues
- Needed a job
- Personal drug and/or alcohol abuse
- Death of a loved one
- Arrested and incarcerated
- Too much freedom/not enough rules in my life
- Personal physical health problems
- Parent/guardian uninvolved in my schooling
- Housing instability or homelessness
- Had to care for family member (other than own children)

The D2 Center has created a model for reengaging dropouts and disengaging youth through an educational support system that fills gaps in educational resources and student support services in the community. The model is strategic in providing support services and connections to services that help youth determine their future and take action to transition from being an economic liability to an economic engine, driving to their goals and future aspirations. The development of the model included the identification of the key success components that frame the service design of the D2 Center.

**Ten Components of Success and D2 Center Services: a long-term commitment through graduation and beyond**

1. **Identification**
   D2 Center staff members stay connected to schools and community agencies that come in contact with D2 youth by visiting sites, attending meetings, and communicating with other caring adults. The D2 Center website (www.d2center.org) is a resource providing participant qualifications, staff listings and contact information, a web-based application form, and a blog featuring the latest activities and news. The D2 Center also participates on the social media sites Facebook and Twitter. A goal over the next year is to develop a media campaign with key partners to publicly reach out to D2 youth.

2. **Intake**
   The intake process is focused on listening to youth at the interview stage (parents are also interviewed, if possible). Each youth has a unique story and usually multiple challenges to
overcome if he/she will succeed. At intake the goal is to identify as many of these challenges as possible up front, so that an initial plan can be developed and implemented to meet current needs, which may include a different school setting. Youth take the Wonderlic Basic Skills Test which measures verbal and quantitative skills. At the end of the intake, an action plan is developed and the youth is assigned a Youth Academic Navigator.

3. Caring Adult
A Youth Academic Navigator (YAN) builds a relationship with the youth, provides support and encouragement for attendance and credit attainment, and is a connection to community-based services and programs. YANs facilitate the implementation of the action plan and provide support year-round. They stay connected with youth no matter what educational program they are in or even if they are not in any program for a period of time. YANs maintain contact with youth who attend any school in Douglas or Sarpy counties or when they are placed in a residential facility such as the Douglas County Youth Center, Job Corps, Journeys, Geneva, Kearney, or Boys Town. The YAN integrates services with other case managers, social workers or counselors. The maximum case load of a YAN is forty youth.

4. Community Resources
The D2 Center has established a network of strong community partners to help meet the needs of D2 youth. The collective impact of these collaborative partnerships supports youth to reach their goals. When particular needs and issues arise with their youth, YANs connect youth to resources in the community such as foster youth programs, homeless interventions, teen parent support, etc. (see Appendix A).

5. Engagement
For youth who are out of school, options for school placement are discussed and the youth and parent are provided information on how to enroll in their local school district. YANs monitor attendance on a weekly basis and assist youth to overcome barriers to attendance and academic achievement. Student grades are monitored and discussed each grading period so that academic supports can be put in place as needed. D2 youth are provided free bus passes for any activities at the D2 Center.

6. Academic Support
Academic support available to D2 youth includes several options:

- Elective credit classes, taught by certified teachers, are available at the D2 Center in literacy, numeracy, career studies, life skills, and health.
- Tutoring and academic support at the D2 Center is available on an as-needed basis as well as two afternoons per week during the school year. Certified teachers provide one-on-one assistance in most subject areas.
- YANs are aware of school/community options for credit recovery and tutoring and encourage D2 youth to participate.
7. Career Development
The Careers and Community Engagement Program (C & CE) at the D2 Center provides credit-bearing instructional activities and experiences focusing on career planning and preparation, post-secondary opportunities, community engagement and volunteerism.

- Career readiness courses focus on postsecondary and career readiness including career exploration and experiential learning opportunities, life skills, and planning for the future.
- The courses use Nebraska Career Connections, the Nebraska Career Education model of career clusters.
- The courses were developed in a free online learning management system, Moodle, to create course delivery options that blend technology and direct instruction.
- The courses often integrate life skills and goal-setting lessons.

8. Completion
The D2 Center tracks initial credits and all credits earned while in the program. Goals are set for credit attainment and progress toward graduation. YANs and D2 Center staff maintain close and ongoing contact with parents, teachers, counselors, or anyone who can assist in supporting the youth and keeping them on track with credit goals.

9. Post-Graduation Goals
During the intake process youth identify career and educational goals. This provides an initial conversation for YANs to help youth begin developing a concept of a "future self" and to keep the dialogue moving forward regarding future plans. As youth mature, these goals may change, and YANs and the C & CE project coordinator stand ready to assist and to utilize resources in the community when appropriate. Youth may take a tour of Metropolitan Community College campuses, meet with a counselor there, or be provided postsecondary education information and assistance from Education Quest either by appointment or as a part of a class.

10. Post-Graduation Placement
Students have access to one-on-one assistance with enrollment in a postsecondary education or training program, job search, completing job applications, resume writing, mock interviews, and other job-related skills. Follow-up tracking of graduates occurs at six-, twelve-, eighteen- and twenty-four-month intervals to determine engagement in post-secondary opportunities and employment and to offer assistance, as needed.

Investing in D2 Youth
The research encouraging investment in early childhood education has been a positive development sweeping across the U.S. in recent years. The reasoning seems obvious — prioritization of early childhood education may change the trajectory of multi-generational poverty. Few can argue the logic of this assumption based on "an ounce of prevention...." However, supports during early childhood may
not result in young adults earning a high school diploma, prepared for post-secondary education and a career, especially if the supports have not been long-term and the youth is growing up in a disadvantaged environment. Like early childhood education, investment in youth who dropped out or are disengaging should be a high priority investment. A strategic investment in young adults completing a minimum of a high school diploma will pay dividends to future generations.

Investing in D2 youth provides an additional opportunity to break the cycle of poverty. Young adults who earn a high school diploma and are preparing for postsecondary educational and training opportunities are more focused on future success and outcomes than are youth who drop out and become disengaged from further education and productive career and work experiences. As life experiences accumulate and youth mature into young adults in their late teens, the realization that education will play a vital role in a successful future is not uncommon. A strong adult advocate at this critical juncture may help tip the balance of competing life circumstances toward engagement and completion of a high school diploma by age twenty-one. The rapid development of reengagement centers in this country in the last few years is recognition that breaking the cycle is well worth the risk of investment.

The economic benefits of investing in D2 and opportunity youth provide a strong rationale for the risk of investment. The facts show that failure to reach out and engage these youth and get them back on track toward productivity has high costs both for the youth as well as the community. Will communities turn their backs on these young adults, knowing the personal, social, and economic consequences? Does each of these youth still count — every student, every day — or will the community give up too soon and conclude, "They had their chance and failed, and we failed, too." The D2 Center rejects this approach and is determined to play a vital role in assisting high risk youth to complete high school and prepare for success at the postsecondary level, in a career, and in life.

**D2 Center Data and Outcomes**

As of July 31, 2014, the D2 Center has served 272 youth with an age range of fourteen to twenty-one and an average age of seventeen at the time of intake. A slightly higher percentage of female youth are served than males. Through a self-identification process, over half (52%) of the students are Hispanic or Latino, 24% black or African-American, and 20% white or Caucasian.

Data so far indicate that D2 youth beginning the D2 Center program average just under half the credits needed to complete a high school diploma. For older youth, this mountain may look too steep to climb, but through the design of the D2 Center an action plan to complete a high school diploma is mapped out for each student with a short-term or long-term graduation goal. The key outcome for these youth and the basic measure of success is a high school diploma. As of July, 2014, fifty-six students receiving support services from the D2 Center earned a high school diploma. That is 21% of the total population of the students served. Another 47% are making progress towards completing a high school diploma. The high school diploma is the primary goal; however, credits earned are steps measured to gauge progress toward this goal.
The success of the fifty-six graduates supported by the D2 Center equates to a positive economic impact. If these students continue with their education, training, and/or career goals, and enter the workforce with at least a high school diploma, the earnings gained and the taxpayer gains are significant, as illustrated in the chart below:

**Earnings Gained**
Fifty-six D2 Center Graduates

- Annual: $446,040
- Lifetime: $17,841,600

**Taxpayer Gains**
Fifty-six D2 Center Graduates

- Annual: $208,320
- Lifetime: $8,332,800

*Voices for Children in Nebraska (2013); U.S. Census Bureau (2012), Belfield, Levin and Rosen (2012)*

Currently, 17% of the active D2 youth are not engaged in any educational program. The cycle of disengagement may repeat itself, but the D2 Center continues to reach out to these youth and to provide them opportunities to reengage when they are ready. For additional information on D2 Center data and outcomes, see Appendix B.

**Outreach and Leadership in Supporting D2 Youth**

Development of a reengagement center in Omaha began in late 2010. The Sherwood Foundation, a local, private family foundation, retained national consulting firm The Parthenon Group to complete a research study of reengagement centers in the United States. A segmentation analysis of Omaha Public Schools dropouts and students off track to graduate on time was also conducted. In 2011 the D2 Center opened its doors and began forging a pathway to create a new approach to addressing the needs of disengaging and disconnected youth in Omaha. Outreach and leadership have included a variety of activities to create awareness, align services, and lead in transforming D2 youth from an economic liability to an economic asset through individualized educational supports and services.

The D2 Center facilitated a Multiple Pathways to Graduation Summit in 2011 to bring more attention to the problem of disengaged high school youth in the metro Omaha area. A mapping project outlining all available alternative and credit recovery options in eleven school districts in Douglas and Sarpy counties was conducted by the D2 Center in 2012. The D2 Center began collaborating with partners to develop Omaha's first Youth Attendance Navigator Program, which became the Youth Academic Navigator Program (YAN Program) at the D2 Center. The D2 Center has four full-time YANs, and the YAN program remains the centerpiece of D2 Center youth services. The Careers and Community Engagement Program was also launched at the D2 Center in 2012 to assist D2 youth in preparing for postsecondary education and careers.
The D2 Center continues to develop partnerships and seek collaboration with local entities to align a network of governmental agencies, non-profit providers, philanthropic supporters, and secondary and postsecondary educators to strategically support D2 youth. Key stakeholders in the community collaborate to improve graduation rates and prepare students for success in postsecondary education and careers. The D2 Center remains a contributing and active member of the National League of Cities Reengagement Center Network in order to stay current with trends and initiatives that continue to spread across the country.

From a small pilot program beginning just over three years ago, the D2 Center has gradually grown to actively engage over 270 youth. Participation by youth is voluntary, and the commitment to youth by D2 Center staff remains strong and ongoing. Although a school district, state, or national entity may choose to only measure four or five-year graduates of a school district, the D2 Center emphatically believes that six and seven-year graduates should also be counted carefully, one by one.

Every graduate counts today and every day in the future. The D2 Center is an important beacon of hope in the Omaha community, and in partnership with schools and other community resources, the work to help youth earn a diploma must grow and continue. D2 youth need guidance and support to develop a positive future identity based on the maxim: *Invest in yourself.* The economic health and well-being of this community and country are depending on it.
References


Appendix A: Collaborative Partners

The D2 Center has many collaborative partners, and the following list includes key partners—those who provide a support service or serve as a referral source and those partners who also provide a direct educational service.

**Support & Referral Partners**

**Building Healthy Futures (BHF)**— D2 Center YANs refer youth/families through BHF to partner agencies for services regardless of their insurance status: OneWorld Community Health Centers (physical, dental, and mental health services), Charles Drew Health Centers (physical, dental, and mental health services), University of Nebraska Medical Center (dental health), or Alegent Creighton (dental health). Youth in OPS may also be referred directly to a School-Based Health Center.

**Douglas County (DC) Juvenile Probation, DC Attorney’s Office, and Juvenile Assessment Center**— Douglas County staff members refer youth to the D2 Center for those who choose to participate. Ongoing communication between the D2 Center and DC programs occurs, and YANs go to court or other meetings to keep informed about their D2 youth.

**Early Childhood Services Teen and Young Parent Program (TYPP)**— D2 Center YANs refer pregnant and parenting teens to TYPP, which utilizes a variety of direct services from Child Saving Institute, Heartland Family Service, Lutheran Family Services, Nebraska Children’s Home Society, and the Visiting Nurse Association to support pregnant and parenting teens. TYPP agency staff members refer youth to the D2 Center for extra academic support.

**Education Quest**— D2 youth and families are encouraged to get assistance with the FAFSA, scholarships, college admission, and other postsecondary questions. Education Quest staff make presentations, as needed, with small groups of D2 youth and/or parents.

**Omaha African American Male Achievement Collaboration**— The D2 Center is one of many community partners participating in this initiative, sponsored by The Empowerment Network with technical assistance from the National League of Cities, in order to improve educational and employment outcomes in the North Omaha community. As part of a pilot project, the D2 Center will provide disconnected high school youth with the opportunity to utilize D2 Center services.

**Planned Parenthood of the Heartland (PPH)**— A PPH educator assists D2 Center teachers with the summer elective class "Better Family Health," and D2 youth are referred to PPH for a variety of sexual health services.

**Project Everlast, Project Employment, and The Opportunity Passport**— These Nebraska Children and Families Foundation programs assist D2 youth who are or have been in foster care with a variety of
services including assistance with homeless issues and independent living, housing, job readiness and placement, and physical and mental health.

**Youth Emergency Services (YES)**—D2 Center YANs refer youth to YES for assistance with homeless issues and emergency housing, independent living, food and clothing, job training, domestic violence, and medical and dental services. Youth may also be referred to the D2 Center by YES staff members.

**Educational Service Provider Partners**

**Douglas County Youth Center (DCYC)**—D2 Center YANs visit youth when they are placed in DCYC and communicate with the educational liaison about progress in classes. D2 Center staff members go to DCYC to visit with individual youth to encourage them to voluntarily participate in the D2 Center Program and complete intake before their release.

**Goodwill Partnership for Youth**—Youth in the Partnership program who are still working on a high school diploma may be referred to the D2 Center for academic support. The D2 Center refers youth to the Partnership for GED support at the time of inquiry about the D2 Center program, or when they are aging out and it's determined that a high school diploma is no longer a realistic option for a D2 youth. The Partnership provides options for career exploration, job readiness, job skills and training, tuition assistance, and connections to employers through Heartland Workforce Solutions.

**Job Corps**—D2 Center youth may choose to leave the metro Omaha area and get job skills training in several trades and careers as they complete a GED or high school diploma. YANs stay in contact with D2 youth in the Job Corps to monitor whether they complete a program there or return to Omaha and need to be reengaged again.

**Schools and School Districts**—Although over 90% of D2 youth attend(ed) Omaha Public Schools traditional and alternative education programs, the D2 Center has also served youth in traditional and/or alternative programs in Ralston Public Schools, Papillion LaVista Public Schools, and Westside Community Schools as well as the Omaha Street School (private). D2 Center YANs maintain contact with youth in residential facilities such as Boys Town, Nebraska Correctional Youth Facility, Journeys (Catholic Charities), and Youth Residential Treatment Centers in Geneva and Kearney, Nebraska.

**Metropolitan Community College (MCC) and Gateway to College**—Career-related experiences are coordinated between MCC staff and the D2 Center careers coordinator such as a "trades tour" involving visits to multiple facilities or specific experiences such as an MCC welding or culinary arts workshop. Youth are connected to MCC counselors for inquiries about GED testing, admission, and financial aid. Young adults eighteen and over are provided information about MCC Express (GED classes, literacy, ESL, workforce skills, industry certifications, etc.). Youth are encouraged to apply to the Gateway to College Program as a school option that allows for dual credits for a high school diploma and MCC college credits. For those who do attend Gateway to College, communication between the YAN and resource specialist at MCC Gateway is ongoing.
Appendix B: D2 Center Data and Outcomes

D2 Youth Demographics

- **Gender**: D2 youth are more likely to be female (54%) than male (46%).
- **Age**: The average age of D2 youth when they apply is 17; the range is 14-20.
- **Race/Ethnicity**: Over half (52%) of D2 youth identify themselves as Hispanic.
- **Number of Credits**: A typical D2 youth comes to the D2 Center with just under half of the required credits needed to graduate (Omaha Public Schools requires forty-nine credits).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D2 Center Students by Gender</th>
<th>D2 Center Students by Age at Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 14</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 16</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 17</td>
<td>76</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 20</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D2 Center Students by Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of Credits at Action Plan Meeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian / Alaska Native</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 0-9</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 10-19</td>
<td>57</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 20-29</td>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 30-39</td>
<td>58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 40+</td>
<td>44</td>
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</table>
Other Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Current</th>
<th>Total since 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active / In Progress Students</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnant / Parenting Teens</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current or former Douglas County Probation Students</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current or former foster youth (self-reported)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Disengagement Level and Student Placement

- At the time of application to the D2 Center, 117 (43%) of D2 youth are still enrolled in a traditional high school, 81 (30%) are enrolled in an alternative school/program, and 27% are not enrolled in a school/program.
- Although many D2 youth are technically enrolled in a school/program at the time of application, a majority of these youth have poor attendance and are in the process of disengaging.

Disengagement Level at Application

- Many D2 youth migrate in and out of various school placements and programs and consequently may not always be attending school. These youth remain active as long as communication is occurring between the youth and their YAN, and a high school diploma is still feasible.
- Due to the D2 Center location and limited marketing thus far, a large majority of D2 youth attend Omaha Public Schools.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>D2 Center Student Placement</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not Attending School</strong></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OPS Traditional High Schools</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South High</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryan High</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central High</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benson High</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest High</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke High</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North High</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OPS Alternative School / Programs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Study Program</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accelere High School Program</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNO/OPS Middle College Program</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blackburn Alternative High School</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parrish Expelled Student Program</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Residential / Correctional Facilities</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys Town</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCYC</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Kearney High</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCYF Community High</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journeys</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Metro Area Public School Districts</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papio South High</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papillion IDEAL School</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Westside Career Center</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralston High</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dual Credit (Community College)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan CC Gateway to College</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>D2 Center only</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Penn Foster Independent High School</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participation and Outcomes

D2 youth status definitions are:

- **Graduated**: Earned high school diploma
- **Engaged**: Intake complete and attending school
- **Intake In Progress (engaged)**: Intake not complete; attending school
- **Intake In Progress (not engaged)**: Intake not complete; not attending school
- **Not Engaged**: Intake complete and not attending school
- **Inactive**: Intake complete. Formerly active in D2 Center program. Reasons include: Pursuing GED, moved out of town, refusal to attend or communicate, parenting, working, incarcerated, or unknown

### D2 Center Student Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intake In Progress (engaged)</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intake In Progress (not engaged)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Engaged</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inactive</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The D2 Center offers four or five elective credit classes each summer. Students may also bank hours toward an elective credit during the school year.
- Total credits calculated for the semester ending in May 2014.

### D2 Youth Credits Earned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Credits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total enrollment in D2 Center courses (June 2011 – July 2014)</td>
<td>122.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total D2 Center elective credits</strong> earned (June 2011 – July 2014)</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total all credits earned (June 2011 – May 2014)</td>
<td>2,036.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total High School Diplomas earned</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>