



Annual Report

2020-2021



Dear Friends,

This year marks the tenth year the D2 Center has been in operation serving disengaged youth in the Omaha community. These youth have withdrawn from school, are disengaging from school, or are off track to graduate on time. Most of them have left traditional high schools and are, or will be, served in alternative programs. As Omaha's only reengagement center, the D2 Center's primary goals are to get students back into school, keep them in school, and support them to finish their high school diplomas. Over the last ten years, 1,100 have been served in the Youth Academic Navigator (YAN) Program with 460 graduating from high school and about 200 still active in the program. An additional 1000+ students have been served over the past five years in the Omaha Public Schools (OPS)/D2 Center Reengagement Project where D2 Center staff members are doing outreach to dropout youth in partnership with OPS. We believe that no matter what their life circumstances are or what traumatic events may have impacted their lives, each one of these youth is important and getting a high school diploma is a basic credential for a better future.

Nine full-time and eight part-time staff members are providing services to the youth:

- Seven YANs have caseloads of 30-35 students and build relationships with youth through mentoring, academic coaching, tracking school progress, and connecting students to community resources. YANs see their students at school, do home visits, and communicate with other adults, including parents and school staff members, who are supporting the youth.
- Two Career Navigators work with seniors and graduates on postsecondary planning, career exploration, job hunting, and 1:1 assistance with educational and training opportunities.
- Five Nebraska-certified teachers provide tutoring and elective credit opportunities throughout the school year and summer.
- YANs and Career Navigators also do outreach to OPS dropouts and encourage and assist them with reenrolling in school.

The pandemic and remote learning in the 2020-21 school year created many challenges for students, schools, parents, and the D2 Center. Failure rates and disconnection from school increased as more students were falling behind or leaving school. Reengagement Project outreach expanded by over 40% from previous years. The D2 Center is committed to finding and supporting these youth, and the 2021-22 school year will be a critical one for their future.

Our thanks to the City of Omaha, United Way of the Midlands, The Sherwood Foundation, and the Weitz Family Foundation for their ongoing support. We appreciate the support we get from individuals in the community like you, who also understand that every young person counts, and a high school diploma is a pathway to a better future. Please follow us on Facebook and Twitter or visit our website at www.d2center.org.


Sincerely,



Jerry Bexten
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Carolyn T. Miller
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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Kelsey Hansen

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Netta Prince

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Clem Bell
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Terry Kocsis
Jackie Thomas



Pandemic: The Challenge of Our Time

One measure of youth disconnection is that of Opportunity Youth, young people ages 16-24 who are neither working nor in school. The United States made steady progress for a decade from 2010 to 2019 seeing the national youth disconnection rate drop from 14.7% of this population to 10.7%. Although data is still incomplete, the fear is that many of these gains have been lost, especially in terms of youth being in school and making progress since the pandemic struck in the spring of 2020. For youth who were hoping to graduate from high school in 2020, the impact in Nebraska and locally was significant. The state graduation rate dropped a percentage point, and it dropped three points in OPS. The impact on the Class of 2020-21 is not yet known, but expectations are not optimistic.

The students who traditionally are more at risk of falling behind or dropping out appear to have been affected the most. Due to various systemic factors, these students tend to live in poverty and

are students of color. They had more technology issues working remotely, had less academic support at home, and had more difficulty adapting to unstructured, online learning options. Many had parents who lost jobs, and if the student found a job they then worked to support their families. Lacking the structure and personal connections available at school, many lost motivation and failed classes or dropped out altogether. This negative trend was evident with students participating in the D2 Center YAN Program.

To meet the challenge, the D2 Center ramped up outreach efforts to disengaged students through the OPS/D2 Center Reengagement Project. This Project started in 2016 and allows D2 Center staff members to work in partnership with OPS staff members to target dropouts for reenrollment in school. Because OPS has robust alternatives in their Multiple Pathways Program, students have “on ramps” to various school options throughout the year

ANNUAL INCOME BY EDUCATION ATTAINMENT



Dropout: **\$32,188**
HS Grad: **\$40,612**
\$8,424 difference annually

POVERTY BY EDUCATION ATTAINMENT

Dropout: **12.8%**
HS Grad: **5.5%**



beyond traditional high schools. In 2018-19, the D2 Center served 242 students in the Project, and in 2019-20 the number dropped to 210 mostly due to the pandemic. However, in 2020-21, 347 students were served, a 43% increase from 2018-19, a non-pandemic school year.

By the summer of 2021, a record 34 of these students had already graduated from high school and 45 were still enrolled as a new school year began.

The 2021-22 school year looks to be another year of pandemic challenges. The Reengagement Project will undoubtedly be large again. The D2 Center is aware from the experience of the last year and a half that more students than ever, even those who did not drop out, have fallen behind and are

off track to graduate on time. In anticipation of the challenges ahead, the D2 Center is hiring additional staff to meet the need. A recruitment strategy for the YAN Program has been implemented to provide academic and other supports to students who are struggling to get back on track and graduate from high school. A high school diploma is a critical credential for our youth to qualify for college, postsecondary training programs, the military, and many good-paying jobs. A high school diploma leads to higher annual earnings, economic growth in our community, higher tax revenues, health-care cost savings, increased auto and home sales, increased spending, more jobs, and fewer people in prison, unemployed or under-employed, or living in poverty.

We need your support to meet the challenge of our time!

D2 Center Student Snapshot

302
TOTAL
STUDENTS

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO ARE:



Current or former juvenile/criminal justice system involvement (122)



Recipients of special education services in high school (66)



Current or former foster youth (52)



Pregnant or parenting (52)

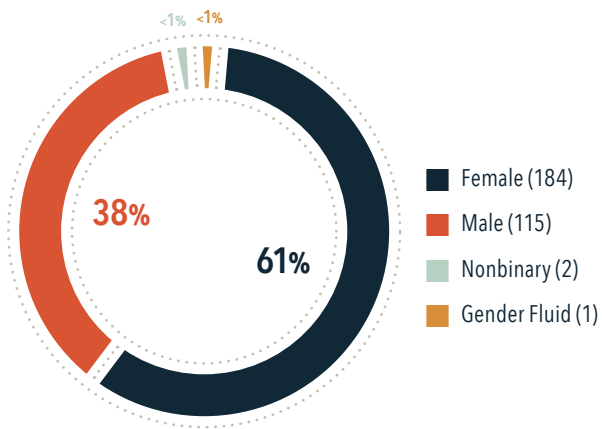


Recipients of English Language Learner services in high school (14)

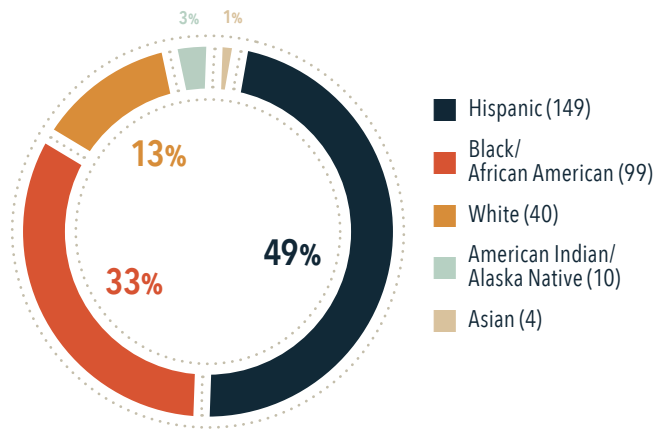
Students may be in multiple categories or none at all.



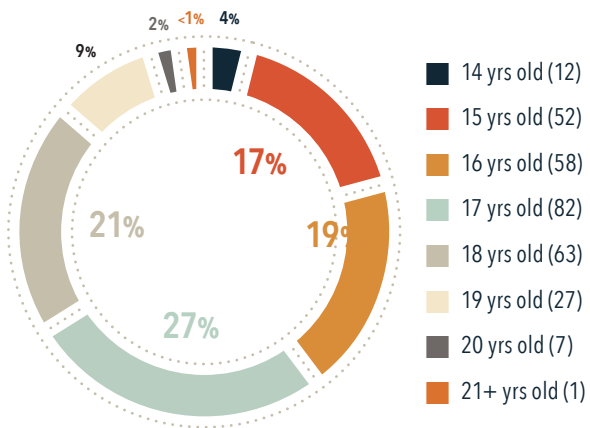
STUDENT GENDER



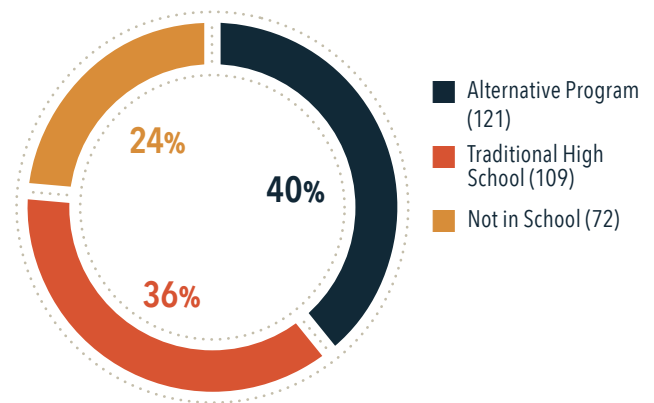
STUDENT RACE/ETHNICITY



STUDENT AGE AT INTAKE



SCHOOL ENROLLMENT STATUS



Paw's Story:

Off the Roller Coaster and On to Success

Paw was born in Burma. She grew up learning the Chin language and spent eight years in Malaysia before coming to the U.S. in 6th grade. Her life, as she describes it, was a "fast-paced roller coaster," and various poor decisions led to problems in middle school. She was bullied, lacked self-esteem, and started getting into fights. In 9th grade, she managed to get through her first year of high school with only a few failing grades, and she also took her last English as a Second Language (ESL) classes that year and transitioned out of the program.

During 10th grade, Paw hit a low point in her young life. She was expelled from high school, was dismissed from the expelled student program, and landed in the Douglas County Youth Center (DCYC). From there, she went to Blackburn Alternative High School for a short time and DCYC again before being sent to a residential facility in Colorado. Drug possession, auto theft, assault, weapons charges, and hanging with the wrong crowd had caught up to her. She describes being "angry, defiant, and determined not to cooperate" as she was handcuffed and put on a plane to Colorado. She had truly hit bottom.

Paw fought the strict rules in her new environment for a while, but then began to realize two things: she really missed her family, and she had to cooperate to get released. She focused on her treatment and started earning high school credits. In February 2019, Paw returned to her family, Omaha, and Blackburn with a different attitude. She realized the staff there really wanted to help her be successful. Regretting the hurt and heartache she had put on her family and others, she understood she had to reevaluate her friendships to avoid trouble. Focused on academics, she discovered an emerging interest in criminal justice. She started thinking about a career in which she could someday work and help improve the criminal justice system.

Paw met D2 Center Career Navigator Bette Norton Ball in her senior year. Bette came to Blackburn every Wednesday morning and worked with Blackburn counselor, Dr. Suzy Busby, helping seniors with post-secondary planning. Bette and the Blackburn staff members in Paw's network of support could see she had become a positive role model and continued to encourage her to set and meet goals. Because of her criminal record, Paw reacted in disbelief when Bette told her she could pursue her goals by going to Metropolitan Community College (MCC). They worked together on an MCC application, and Bette connected her to the Reentry Program at MCC. Bette helped her with scholarship applications and essays as well as her Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). She was working part-time at Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), and Bette suggested she apply for the KFC Reach Scholarship. Paw developed clear goals her senior year: she would take two years at MCC and then transfer to a four-year university and earn a degree in criminal justice.

Paw graduated in May 2020. Her eventual goal is to help guide people in the right direction and help them avoid her mistakes.

Eventually, Paw wants to become a police officer. In the fall of 2020, Paw started at MCC with the Johnny Rodgers scholarship and the KFC Reach Scholarship. She enjoys school, working, and caring for her three-year-old brother. She's off the roller coaster now and on a path to success!



How Students Connect With D2 Center

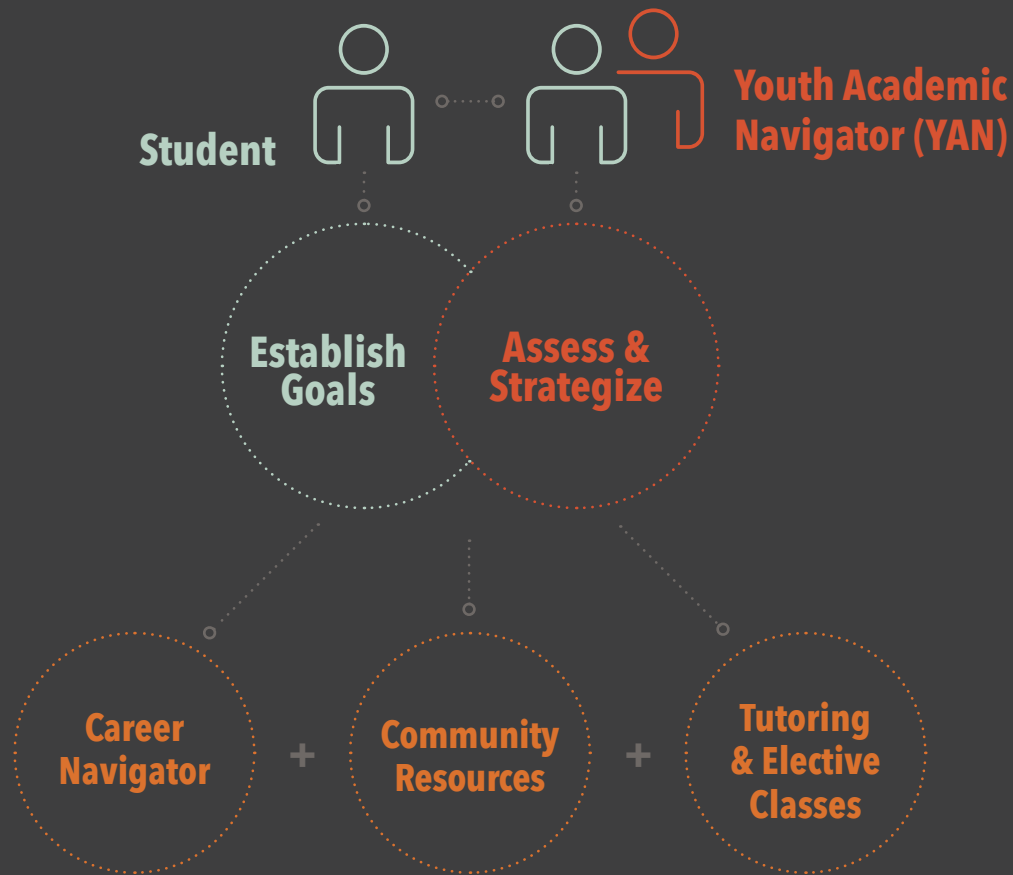
✓ **Omaha Public Schools**
(and other school districts)

Via Social Workers,
Guidance Counselors, etc.

✓ **Student/Family**

✓ **Community/Programs**

Via DC Juvenile Services, NECC Teen &
Young Parent Program, Boys Town



IDEAL OUTCOMES



Reengagement

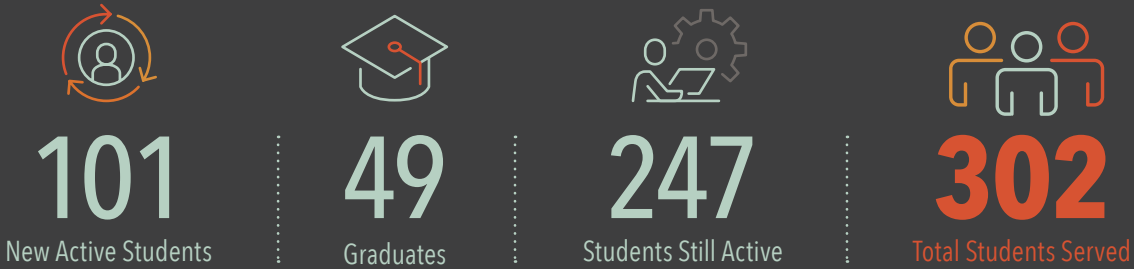


Graduation



**Postsecondary/
Career**

YOUTH ACADEMIC NAVIGATORS

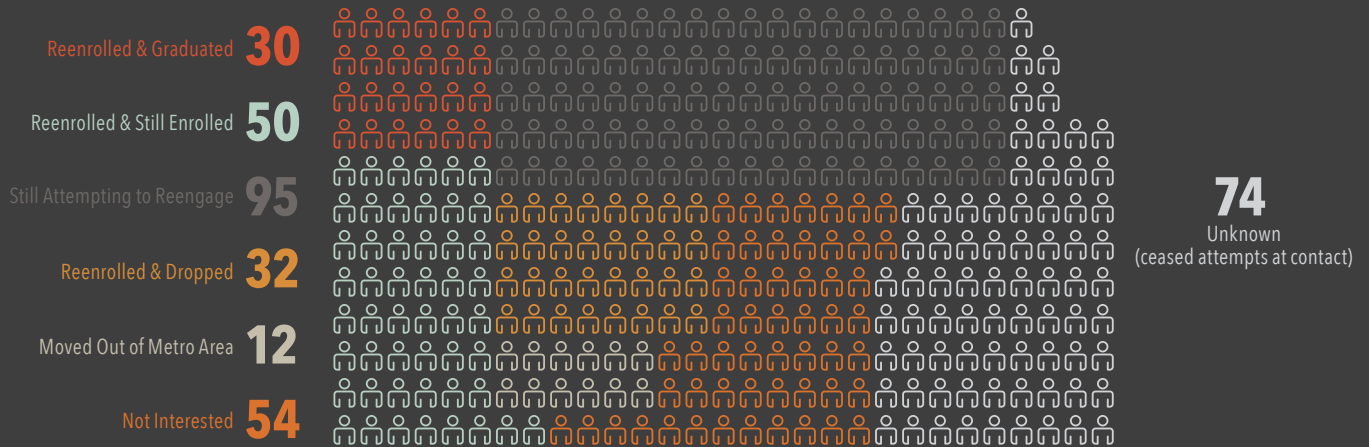


CAREER NAVIGATOR

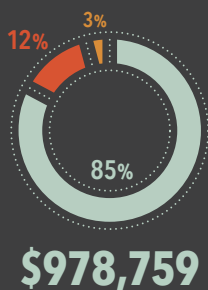
D2 Center Students Served **75** Due to COVID, No Additional OPS Multiple Pathways Students Were Served




REENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST

347 Students Contacted



EXPENDITURES



-  Payroll & Benefits*
\$829,852
-  Operations
\$117,320
-  Professional Fees, Professional Development, Community Outreach & Events
\$31,587

*Full-time Staff - 9 Part-time Staff - 8

ELECTIVE CREDIT CLASSES & TUTORING



38 students earned **34 elective credits** at the D2 Center

23 students attended tutoring **91 times**



Erik's Story:

"Thank you for helping me stay on track."

When YAN Hansel Gonzalez first met Erik in the spring of his 10th-grade year, he knew that attendance and taking school seriously would be the biggest challenges. Hansel spoke with Erik's school social worker, who had referred him to the D2 Center and who felt he had a lot of potential despite his struggles and attitude. To Erik, school was a social place to meet and hang out with friends. On some days he would show up around lunchtime, eat with friends in the cafeteria, and then skip out with them or go back home. After a few months, Hansel figured out that Erik's game plan was to get serious near the end of each semester and hopefully pass as many classes as he could by those last-ditch efforts. It worked fairly well and in the first couple of years, he managed to pass about two-thirds of his classes. This helped matters at home because his mom believed education was very important.

Hansel introduced himself to Erik's mom on a home visit and listened to her pleas to help her son take school more seriously. Occasionally, she would reach out to Hansel to get an update on his grades and attendance. When the pandemic hit in the spring of 2020, Erik and his mom both lost their jobs, and he was no longer attending school in person. For Erik, being at home turned out to be a good thing since he had more time to focus on school and could not go there to hang out with friends. As summer approached, Hansel sat down with Erik and came up with a graduation plan that actually seemed possible to Erik. If he took summer school and passed all his classes his senior year, he still had a shot to graduate on time. All he would need were some extra credits that he could get virtually through OPS Adult High School and the D2 Center.

Hansel stressed the sacrifices Erik's parents had made for him and how proud and happy his mom would be if he graduated. Erik seemed to be working better at home without the social distractions at school. When he passed all his classes in the summer and first semester of his senior year, he really believed he had a shot at graduating on time. He started an online class at Adult High School in early spring and began working with a D2 Center teacher on his first elective. Hansel received a call from Erik's mom that spring because she worried he was stressing out and

had too much anxiety about passing his classes. Hansel encouraged and counseled Erik to keep his sights on the goal. He finished his first Adult High School class as well as a D2 Center elective and immediately signed up for one more of both. He kept his grades up at school. And the result? A May graduation, a proud son, and a very happy mom! Erik told Hansel after graduating, "Without your help, I would never have graduated on time. Thank you for helping me stay on track the last couple years."

Hansel enjoyed working with Erik for over two years and could see a gradual maturity and changing attitude toward school and his future. He started taking responsibility for his actions and showing signs of ambition. When they talked about his future, he was generally uncertain about what he wanted to do other than something where he was working with his hands—construction, mechanics, or culinary. In the summer of 2021, Erik was taking general education classes part-time at MCC South Campus. Hansel proudly reflects, "Seeing his level of determination the last year and what he had to do to apply himself to reach a personal goal makes me hopeful for his future."



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