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Denver Citizens Group Releases Sharp Critique of Denver and Aurora High Schools

A+ Denver calls for radical redesign of urban high schools

Despite reports that more Denver and Aurora students are college-bound, a brief issued today maintains that they are far from college-ready. The report maintains that even though more students are graduating high school and taking college-level (AP) classes, academic performance has hardly budged—and many students graduate well below grade level. The problem is particularly pronounced among low-income and minority students.

Among the findings:

- At six Denver high schools fewer than 1 in 5 students pass the AP exam with a 3, 4 or 5
- More than half of students from Denver and Aurora must first take remedial classes before enrolling in credit-bearing college classes
- Based on Denver's and Aurora's remediation rates, just seventeen of every 100 students who enroll will graduate college in four years
- 25% of Latinos and 24% of African American DPS Juniors score 19 or above on the ACT, while 74% of DPS' white students do
- In Aurora, 39% of low income students score lower than a 15 on the ACT, compared to 23% of non-low income students
- 43% of low income students in DPS score less than a 15 on the ACT – the equivalent to a qualifying score for basic military service
- Denver School of Science and Technology is thus far the only Denver or Aurora high school beating the odds for low income and minority students on every college-readiness indicator

"We see from the high remediation rates and low ACT scores that college-bound is not the same as college-ready. Despite years of trying to fix high schools, students are still not graduating academically prepared for college level work," said Van Schoales, CEO of A+ Denver.

The report recommends completely redesigning high schools based on successful local and national models, not just adding programs or tinkering with reforms. To address the problem in more detail, A+ Denver will be hosting a half-day summit with national and local experts in high school design on April 24th. Details can be found at

www.aplusdenver.org

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