

News Release

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A+ Denver releases updated brief on student achievement

In an updated version of 2011's Start with the Facts, A+ Denver recognizes improvement among low-income and non-low income students in DPS but raises concerns about the rate at which low-income students are showing gains. The report focuses on changes over the past five years.

"Since 2009 the district has made progress, particularly when compared to other big Colorado school districts. Many of the district's strategies—even controversial ones—seem to be bearing fruit. However, the troubling news is often masked by district averages that hide lackluster gains made by low-income students compared to their non-low income peers. Both groups are improving, but at far different rates," said A+ CEO, Van Schoales.

To quicken the pace of progress, A+ calls on the DPS Board of Education and administration to engage in a rigorous and transparent probe of which programs, initiatives, school models, and supports produce the highest gains—and which are less effective. A+ proposes that such an audit would allow the district to eliminate those programs that are the least effective while doubling down resources on those that do work, thus accelerating gains and validating the best strategies.

According to the brief:

- While the percentage of AP tests taken has increased from about 3,500 (2009) to about 5,500 (2013), a third of those tests are taken at a single school (East)—and 90% of those tests are taken by non-low income kids.
- Over the past five years, the percentage of non-poor high school students proficient across subjects increased by 13.7 percent, compared to 7.4 percent for poor students.
- Seventeen percent of low-income high schoolers are proficient in math, with gains that were half that of their higher income peers scores from 2009 to 2013 (8.72% non low income kids moved to proficiency versus 18.48% low-income kids).
- Non-low income students are driving ACT improvement. While the average non low-income student's score is now 21, just 14% of low-income students are scoring a 21 or better on the ACT.
- Seventeen low-income DPS students go on to the top 100 US News colleges every year on average compared to 123 non-low income students. A quarter of the low-income kids going to the best colleges in the country came from one high school: DSSST. None came from North, Bruce Randolph, Manual, or Lincoln.

"We all want kids, whether poor, black, brown, white or middle income, to achieve at levels that will set them on a path to college or a living wage," said Mr. Schoales. "At this rate, it will be 40 years before all low-income students reach proficiency. We have proof points that schools can and are deliberately changing the traditional middle and high school model to prepare all kids for college. Now the question is how to scale up so that great options are available to all students."

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The mission of A+ Denver is to harness the power of Denver's civic leadership to build public will and advocate for the changes necessary to dramatically increase student achievement in public education in Denver. We are an independent, nonpartisan 501(c)(3) organization working to bring the power of Denver's citizens to the effort of school reform. For more information, please visit www.aplusdenver.org.