“If you can’t measure it, you can’t improve it.”

– Peter Drucker
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Executive Summary

The approximately 9,000 opportunity youth in Denver face a wide variety of challenges to re-engaging in education or the workforce. This report is the first attempt in Denver to look at the data for this population in order to understand what they experience, with the goal of ultimately making data-driven decisions with schools, government, businesses and nonprofits that are charged with moving opportunity youth into better education and the jobs our economy needs filled.

Opportunity youth are youth aged 16-24 who are not engaged with school or work.

The original intent of this report was to provide data regarding high school completion, post-secondary attainment and employment data across the subpopulations identified nationally as more likely to be opportunity youth:

- Youth in foster care
- Youth who are homeless
- Youth who are immigrants or refugees
- Youth involved in the juvenile justice system
- Youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ)
- Youth who are pregnant or parenting
- Youth with disabilities

However, as clear as the metrics are, the data for this population was not readily available, and particularly, for these subpopulations.

The data available has created a better picture of who Denver-opportunity youth are as well as how organizations can collaborate to better record data on this population.

Key Takeaways

- There are 8,800 opportunity youth living in Denver. These youth tend to be concentrated on the geographical edges of the city.
- The most common barrier to education or employment for opportunity youth is limited English proficiency, followed by being pregnant or parenting.
60 percent of opportunity youth have at least a high school diploma or GED.

Along the education pipeline, Latino, Black and American Indian males are most likely to drop out.

College enrollment rates are low, and even among youth who enroll in college, less than half go on to complete a degree within six years.

Many youth face multiple overlapping challenges:
- Among subpopulations, the foster youth six year graduation rate is 46 percent. Foster youth are also at high risk for substance abuse and incarceration.
- High school completion rates for youth living with disabilities is 61 percent.
- 65 percent of homeless youth were not employed or attending school, and many also faced challenges of parenting or having been incarcerated.

Various organizations focus on specific subsets of opportunity youth, but their data is not shared and thus cannot be aggregated. Currently there is no central organization that collects information on all of these youth. The biggest challenges to data collection are:
- Sensitive populations, such as immigrants and LGBTQ youth.
- Collecting longitudinal data for youth who are leaving a program (such as foster youth or justice-involved youth).

Even some organizations that keep very robust data do not collect information on employment status or whether a youth had previously dropped out, making it difficult to track outcomes for opportunity youth in particular.

During this research it was found that there is a desire for better data sharing and better collection and use of data. Working together to create a set of common measures, a common portal and regular collaboration and sharing of best practices could help to better inform efforts to serve opportunity youth.

We hope this phase I report is useful in understanding and describing the opportunity youth population and may lead to fiscal and programmatic decisions across Denver's ecosystem for opportunity youth. The Phase II challenge is to collect better outcome data.

This data report supports the Denver Opportunity Youth Policy Report “Opportunity Youth: A Touchstone for our state’s future” denveroy.org/policy.
Overview

In creating a fuller picture of who Denver’s opportunity youth are, estimates were taken from national (U.S. Census) and local (Denver Workforce Services, DPS, etc) sources. In addition, geographic and longitudinal data show estimates of where opportunity youth are living and how their numbers change over time.

The following pages provide estimates and characteristics of the overall opportunity youth population.

Population Estimates

According to Measure of America, in 2016, approximately 8,800 opportunity youth were living in Denver.1

This number has been consistently decreasing since the start of the Denver opportunity youth Initiative in 2014, when the number was over 10,000, driven by many factors including a sharp decline in unemployment rates. Despite the encouraging trends, there is much work to be done.

Opportunity youth are more likely than the general youth population to be people of color, to have lower levels of educational attainment and to face additional challenges, such as lacking health insurance, being a parent, not having U.S. citizenship or living with a disability, as can be seen in the following charts, based on data from the U.S. Census.

Figure 1 compares the general population of 16-to-24-year-olds to opportunity youth. American Indian, Latino and Black youth are more likely to be disconnected, as compared to White or Asian youth. For example, Latinos make up 57 percent of the opportunity youth population in Denver, but they represent only 41 percent of the entire youth population in the city.

1 Measure of America. Youth Disconnection by County.http://www.measureofamerica.org/DYinteractive/#County
Where Are Opportunity Youth in Denver?
Opportunity youth in Denver tend to be more concentrated in certain neighborhoods, particularly on the periphery of the city, as can be seen in Figure 2. This may be due to increased housing prices closer to the center of the city. The neighborhoods with the highest rates of youth unemployment are:

- Hale
- Lincoln Park
- Northeast Park Hill
- South Park Hill
- Sun Valley
- Washington Virginia Vale

Despite the encouraging trends, there is much work to be done.

FIGURE 2
Unemployed youth by Denver neighborhood

2 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2012-2016. Note that not all races/ethnicities are depicted in the chart.
Opportunity youth face additional challenges beyond educational attainment or work status, as seen in Figure 3. At the same time, opportunity youth are more likely than the general population to be parents or to be living with a cognitive or physical disability, making the lack of health insurance provided through school or work even more critical. Finally, opportunity youth are more likely than the general population to not have U.S. citizenship, making them ineligible for many types of government support. This list represents the data collected by the U.S. Census and is therefore limited and does not include all subpopulations.

Approximately 30 percent of OY do not have health insurance. While many people receive health insurance through their employer or their college, opportunity youth are disconnected from these sources of health insurance.
All of the barriers and challenges that come with being a part of these subpopulations affects the educational attainment of opportunity youth (Figure 4). However, even with all of the challenges that they face, approximately 60 percent of opportunity youth have attained at least a high school diploma or GED.

**FIGURE 4**
Educational attainment for opportunity youth versus all Denver youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Opportunity youth</th>
<th>Denver population 16-24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HS degree or less</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS diploma or GED</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College degree</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

60% of Opportunity youth have at least a high school diploma or GED.
Youth Served in Denver

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides federal dollars to serve primarily opportunity youth. With more than $1 million in federal funding, the City and County of Denver Workforce Services WIOA contractor – Denver Public Schools – Family and Community Engagement Center is the largest organization in the city serving opportunity youth. Data from workforce centers is one of the best gauges of the status of the overall opportunity youth population. The following information is for youth served at the Denver County Workforce Center from July 1, 2017 to May 3, 2018.4

Due to the federal WIOA legislation, youth served at the workforce center must face barriers to employment or education. According to Denver data, the most common barrier was limited English proficiency, followed by parenting, homelessness, a history of incarceration, living with a disability and involvement with the foster care system, as seen in Figure 5. WIOA does not collect data on LGBTQ youth.

WIOA youth were split evenly between males and females.

- 83 percent of youth served were 16-21 years old
- 17 percent were 21-24 years old

**FIGURE 5**

Barriers to employment or education for WIOA youth in Denver

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited English</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnant/parenting</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster child</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Data provided by the Colorado Workforce Development Council.
Even with all of the barriers faced by these youth, **65 percent had either graduated high school or were currently enrolled**, as seen in Figure 6.

Youth unemployment peaked in Denver at around 20 percent in 2010, then fell to as low as 5 percent 2015 and has started to rise again, reaching around 10 percent in 2016. This is lower than both the national and the state youth unemployment rate, as shown in Figure 7. However, **youth unemployment is still higher than unemployment for the general population**, which has been hovering around 3 percent.

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**FIGURE 7**
Youth unemployment rate 2005-2016

- United States
- Colorado
- Denver

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**FIGURE 6**
Education status of WIOA youth in Denver

- HS student: 29%
- HS dropout: 35%
- HS graduate out of school: 35%
- Post-secondary student: 1%

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**65% of WIOA youth have a high school diploma or GED or are currently enrolled in high school.**
The Pipeline

There are several points in the talent pipeline (education to employment) at which youth may become disengaged. The following pages give a more detailed look at each “leak” in the education pipeline.

Only 23 percent of Denver Public Schools (DPS) students go on to finish a post-secondary credential on time, but 74 percent of jobs in Colorado will require a post-secondary credential by 2020.

High School Dropouts

During the 2016-2017 school year, 1,761 students dropped out of DPS. About 60 percent of dropouts were male. In terms of race/ethnicity, 65 percent of dropouts were Latino, 17 percent were Black and 13 percent were white.\(^6\)

While Latino and Black students make up the largest shares of all dropouts, American Indian students have the highest dropout rate, at 9 percent, compared to around 5 percent for Latino and Black students. Dropout rates were also higher for students with disabilities (5.8 percent) and homeless students (5.7 percent) compared to the district overall (4.2 percent).\(^7\)

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7 Ibid. (Note that the dropout rate is calculated as the percent of all students in grades 7-12 who drop out of school during a particular year, so the dropout rate is not the inverse of the graduation rate.)
High school completion rates (which include graduation or GED) vary by subgroup, as seen in Figure 9. Not all opportunity youth subgroups are tracked. The group with the lowest rate of high school completion is students in foster care. Only 23 percent of students in foster care complete high school within four years. By five years, 41 percent complete, and by six years, 46 percent of these students complete, meaning that fewer than half of all students in foster care complete high school within six years.

Six-year completion rates increase high school completion rates significantly, building the case for increasing the age for per-pupil operating revenue to 24 – a position supported by DOYI and its partners in the “Opportunity Youth: A touchstone for our state’s future” report released in September 2017, denveroy.org/policy.

Rates are also lower than the district average for students with disabilities and homeless students, while completion rates for students with limited English proficiency are close to district averages.

Foster youth have the lowest completion rates of any subgroup with a 46% graduation rate in six years.

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Males and students of color have the lowest postsecondary enrollment rates.

**College Enrollment**
Males from every race/ethnicity are less likely to enroll in postsecondary education than their female counterparts. Blacks, Latinos and American Indians lag behind Whites and Asians, as seen in Figure 10.

**FIGURE 10**
College enrollment by race/ethnicity of Denver public schools high school graduates

Postsecondary Completion
Of Denver Public Schools high school graduates who go on to enroll in college or technical school, graduation rates are low. The six-year postsecondary graduation rate (those who complete any type of degree or certificate within six years) is only 49 percent for females and 40 percent for males, as shown in Figure 11. While these rates include those at two-year or four-year colleges, data from the Colorado Department of Education shows that retention and completion rates are significantly higher for students entering four-year institutions.

Students of color have the lowest postsecondary completion rates. Black: 35%, Latino: 32%.

There are large gaps by race/ethnicity, with completion for Black and Latino students lagging behind that for White and Asian students, as shown in Figure 12.

The Colorado Department of Higher Education does not track postsecondary education outcomes for former opportunity youth or for other subpopulations, such as homeless, foster care, pregnant/parenting, LGBTQ, etc.

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10 Figures 11 and 12 are based on data provided by the Colorado Department of Higher Education.
Subpopulations

Certain subgroups of the overall youth population are more at risk for dropping out of school and being disconnected. In order to not only understand the current opportunity youth population, but also gain insights into those who are at risk for becoming opportunity youth, it is useful to explore the data around each of these subpopulations.

Foster Youth

Foster youth face incredible challenges throughout their lives. It is no surprise that foster youth have the **lowest high school completion** rates of any subgroup, with fewer than half completing high school within six years. One of the reasons for this is a high mobility rate – Colorado foster youth change high schools an average of 3.5 times in 4 years\(^ 11\).

Foster youth also tend to face a number of other overlapping challenges. The following table presents data from the National Youth in Transition Database for Colorado. It followed a cohort of foster youth from ages 17 to 21 from 2011 to 2015. Due to low response rates at age 21, only data from youth ages 17 to 19 are presented. A few key takeaways stand out:

- The vast majority of foster youth (94 percent) are still in school at age 17.
- Between ages 17 and 19, more than one in five respondents experienced homelessness.
- Almost half of foster youth had been referred to substance abuse counseling by age 17.
- More than half of respondents had been incarcerated by age 17.
- About one in 10 respondents gave birth to or fathered a child between ages 17 and 19.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTCOME</th>
<th>Age 17 (85% response rate, N=467)</th>
<th>Age 19 (55% response rate, N=265)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed full- or part-time</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled and attending an educational program</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have experienced homelessness</td>
<td>14% (lifetime)</td>
<td>21% (in past 2 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance abuse assessment or counseling</td>
<td>47% (lifetime)</td>
<td>20% (in past 2 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarceration</td>
<td>58% (lifetime)</td>
<td>38% (in past 2 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had children</td>
<td>6% (lifetime)</td>
<td>10% (in past 2 years)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{11}\) Brown, J. (2018, May 24). Moved from school to school, fewer than 1 in 4 foster kids graduate. That’s worse than homeless kids. The Denver Post.

Pregnant and Parenting

According to estimates from the U.S. Census, approximately 28 percent of opportunity youth are parents, compared to 20 percent for the overall 16-to-24-year-old population in Denver. The good news is that since 2009, the teen birth rate dropped by nearly 50 percent statewide (see Figure 13 from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment), and the birth rate to women aged 20 to 24 declined by 20 percent. Much of the decline in teen birth rates may be attributed to the Colorado Family Planning Initiative, which made long-acting reversible contraception (LARCs) more widely available to low-income teens.

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**FIGURE 13**

Teen fertility rates (births per 1,000 females) 2007-2014

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13 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2012-2016.
Homeless
According to the Voices of Youth Count study of homeless youth in Denver (N=405)\(^5\), 65 percent of homeless youth are not in school and not working, as seen in Figure 14. But, 68 percent of homeless youth have a high school diploma or GED.

Other data on homeless youth give a fuller picture of this population:
- 79% of homeless youth in Denver are male
- 17% are LGBTQ

65\% of homeless youth are not working and not in school.

There is also a great deal of overlap between homeless youth and other subpopulations:
- 59\% of homeless youth have spent time in detention, jail or prison
- 35\% have spent time in foster care

**FIGURE 14**

*Education and employment status of homeless youth versus all Denver youth*

![Graph showing education and employment status of homeless youth versus all Denver youth](image-url)

LIMITED DATA

Immigrant
Data on immigrant youth is very limited. Among Denver youth ages 16 to 24, non-U.S. citizens are much less likely to be enrolled in school, slightly less likely to be employed and more likely to be disconnected than youth who are U.S. citizens (18 percent versus 12 percent). However, there may be limitations to the data on non-citizens, who are less likely to report on surveys such as the U.S. Census.

LGBTQ
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) individuals face social pressures due to the fear of “coming out” or otherwise being exposed to physical, verbal and emotional harm that put them at a higher risk of becoming disconnected. According to the 2015 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey, approximately 14 percent of Colorado students identify as LGBTQ. These students are three times more likely than non-LGBTQ students to miss school because they feel unsafe.  

Disability
According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 9 percent of opportunity youth are living with some type of disability, as compared to only 4 percent of the overall 16-to-24-year-old population. As noted earlier, high school completion rates are lower for youth with disabilities, with only 61 percent completing high school within six years.  

Immigrant youth are more likely to be out of school and not working compared to non-immigrant youth. LGBTQ youth are three times more likely to miss school than non-LGBTQ youth in Colorado. Only 61 percent of Denver youth living with disabilities complete high school within six years.
Justice-Involved Youth

Data specific to education and workforce for this subpopulation, like the others, is not available in any one place. What we do know is that lack of access to good schools and employment is most likely to also contribute significantly to youth involvement in the criminal justice system.¹⁹

There were 1,186 juvenile delinquency cases in Denver in 2016. Black and Latino youth are disproportionately likely to be involved with the criminal justice system in Denver. According to data from the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice:

- Blacks make up 12 percent of the juvenile population (ages 10-17), but account for 29 percent of arrests and 30 percent of those committed to Department of Youth Corrections.
- Latinos make up 59 percent of juveniles, 50 percent of arrests and 67 percent of those committed to Department of Youth Corrections.¹⁹

LATINO AND BLACK YOUTH ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY LIKELY TO BE COMMITTED TO YOUTH CORRECTIONS.

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COLLECTING THE DATA

Sources and Challenges

Trying to count the number of opportunity youth in a given area or quantify characteristics of those youth is no straightforward task. Because these youth are, by definition, outside of the traditional systems of school and work, unlike school system data or other institutional data, there is no single organization that keeps data on this population. The most comprehensive estimates come from the U.S. Census Bureau, but these are simply estimates, derived from a sample of households that is surveyed each year, and do not represent exact numbers and the more granular the data (i.e., age, education and employment status, race/ethnicity, etc.) the larger the margin of error.

A more direct source of information on Denver’s opportunity youth is the service providers who interact directly with these youth. This includes both government (state and city) and nonprofit service providers. For example, the main organization serving high school dropouts in Denver is Colorado Youth for a Change, and the main organization serving unemployed youth is Denver Workforce Services through its federally funded Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act program. Many providers work with opportunity youth, but this system is somewhat of a patchwork, with certain providers focusing on specific subpopulations with limited coordination and often no data sharing agreements between them. Therefore, each individual service provider may have data on the youth that they serve, but no way to track where the youth go after they are no longer served by that organization or to how their youth fit into the larger picture. Using data from service providers is helpful to get a more detailed picture of parts of the population, but it is not possible to aggregate these smaller parts together into a larger picture, as there is no systemic way to count which youth are being served by multiple providers or to find and count youth who are not being served at all, determining long-term outcomes and understanding what works.

High School Completion Data

Records of dropouts and graduation/completion at the school and district level are kept by the Colorado Department of Education. This data can be broken down by race/ethnicity, gender, students with disabilities, limited English proficiency, economically disadvantaged, migrant and homeless.

Source: Colorado Department of Education – http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval.

Challenges: Other subgroups who may be at higher risk for becoming disengaged but are not tracked, including pregnant/parenting students, undocumented students or LGBTQ students, due to disclosure and privacy concerns.
Higher Education Data

Source: The Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE)

Challenges: CDHE only tracks race/ethnicity, gender and eligibility for federal Pell grants but does not publish data on any of the subpopulations.

SUBPOPULATIONS

When collecting data on at-risk subpopulations, it is apparent that there is little uniformity in what data are collected or how these data are collected and used. It is difficult to tell how many of the youth in these subpopulations are by definition opportunity youth, as education and employment status are not collected, so we relied on the best possible sources to give a population-level description of each subpopulation.

Foster Youth

Source: Denver Public Schools and CDE track outcomes for foster youth while they are in school, and Denver Human Services is responsible for the welfare of these youth. However, once youth “age out” of the system at 18, there is little information on what happens to them next. CDE is working to develop longitudinal data for this population that connects to higher ed outcomes. The National Youth in Transition Database attempts to collect information on youth who have aged out, but the response rate tends to decline drastically by the age of 21, making it impossible to generalize due to selection bias of who chooses to respond to the surveys.

Challenges: Although the data points to many overlaps with other systems (justice) and subpopulations (homeless, pregnant and parenting), workforce data is not prioritized for foster youth.

Pregnant and Parenting

Source: Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment tracks teen pregnancies by county.

Challenges: Main data tracked is number of births by age and race/ethnicity, with little else known about the education and employment status of these youth.

Immigrant

Although national data points to an increased likelihood that immigrant youth will become disconnected, data on immigrant youth is difficult to come by.

Source: None

Challenge: Neither CDE nor CDHE ask about immigration status, and there is no single organization or entity responsible for serving these youth. The City and County of Denver has an Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs that partners with a wide range of nonprofit organizations to support the immigrant and refugee community, but immigration status is not collected due to fears from this population in an environment where being undocumented can be used against youth or parents.
Homeless

**Source:** The Annual Point in Time survey, conducted by the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative, and a study by the Voices of Youth Count Initiative.

**Challenges:** Both surveys are conducted over one to two days and mainly count youth who are found to be living on the street or in shelters at that moment. On the advice of the director of Denver’s Road Home, data from the Voices of Youth Count Initiative was chosen for inclusion in this report.

Disability

**Source:** Outcomes for K-12 students with disabilities are tracked by CDE. Post-K-12, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation within the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment serves individuals with disabilities who are seeking employment or training opportunities.

**Challenge:** At the postsecondary level or for youth who are not engaged with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, there is no way to track outcomes for youth with disabilities.

LGBTQ

**Source:** Data on LGBTQ youth is almost non-existent due to the fear of “coming out,” even on a survey. The one source of information for this population is the Healthy Kids Colorado survey, done by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. It asks questions about sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as questions about whether youth feel safe at school, whether they have an adult who can help them with problems and questions about depression, mental health and substance abuse.

**Challenge:** There are no similar data sources for postsecondary or out-of-school youth.

Justice Involved

**Source:** Colorado Division of Criminal Justice

**Challenge:** Data around justice-involved youth tends to focus solely on justice-related outcomes. Thus, there is ample data on arrests, detention, commitment to correction facilities, types of crime and sentencing. There is also good data around disparities in court involvement by race/ethnicity. However, beyond these data points, little else is known about justice-involved youth. Education and employment status of the youth is not collected, nor is other information relating to things such as disability status, homelessness, etc. Once youth leave the justice system, only recidivism rates are tracked. Furthermore, there is not one system, but rather two, depending on the age of the youth, as the juvenile justice system for youth under the age of 18 is separate from the adult criminal justice system for youth 18 and older, making comprehensive data collection for this population even more challenging.
Data Use Survey

In order to get a more comprehensive look at how data for the opportunity youth population is being collected and used, as well as what gaps and challenges remain, DOYI conducted a survey of 11 major government and nonprofit organizations serving youth in Denver, including all members of the DOYI steering committee and the Denver Children’s Cabinet.

Population Served
Most organizations served multiple populations. For example, 71 percent of organizations reported serving all of the subpopulations mentioned in this report (homeless, foster, immigrant, LGBTQ, justice-involved youth, youth with disabilities and youth pregnant/parenting). Although unemployed youth is a key aspect of this research and the work of the Denver Opportunity Youth Initiative, only 43 percent of the respondents identified as serving unemployed youth. Interestingly, most organizations had a population of primary focus, such as foster youth, youth without a high school diploma, etc. Based on the data collected we can now work more closely with these organizations to support their subpopulation.

How is Data on Opportunity Youth Used?
The most common use of data was to inform the organization’s programs. A secondary purpose mentioned by some organizations was for reporting purposes and proposals. A few organizations stated that they used data for evaluating impact. Almost all organizations collect demographic information and most collect education status, but fewer collect information on employment status for youth, as this often falls outside their scope of work.

Challenges
Organizations reported many challenges to data collection and use, including:

• Challenges of following up with youth who leave their programs or only attend sporadically
• Unreliability of self-reported data from youth
• Time required for data collection
• Constantly changing needs of funders
• Challenge of receiving data from external partners or sharing across systems
• Understanding how to use data to evaluate outcomes or return on investment
Needs
One of the policy recommendations in the DOYI Policy report is to improve data systems. Partner organizations interviewed agree and understand the importance of measuring data on this population to inform actions to reduce the number of opportunity youth. The following are expressed needs around data collection from the surveyed organizations:

- Extended longitudinal data for education and employment outcomes
- Clearer ways to use data to show impact of programming
- Local baseline/comparison data
- Data sharing from other organizations (school records, health information, police records, etc.)
- Return on investment data

Overall, most organizations collect information directly related to their own programming, but often do not share or receive information from other entities or collect additional background information outside of their own focus area. This means that each organization has program-level data, but it is difficult to aggregate this information or piece it together to paint a broader picture of Denver youth.
Conclusion

This initial report was an exploratory dive into the availability of data that could influence systemic changes on some of the key issues that affect the economic opportunities of Denver’s marginalized communities. What was learned is that the availability of the data related to education and workforce outcomes is scattered and inconsistently available based on this population. The Denver Opportunity Youth Initiative is already looking to phase II of this research to dive deeper into the data in order to gain a more complete picture of the population, track changes over time and identify the most effective interventions for supporting these youth.

Fortunately, what we have learned so far about Denver’s opportunity youth population will help guide the work of the Denver Opportunity Youth Initiative and hopefully the community as a whole. Opportunity youth in Denver face greater challenges and barriers to education and employment than the overall youth population. Collecting data on this population is also very difficult because they are, by definition, disconnected. Denver has seen some significant strides for this population, but partners need to continue to come together to solve some of these issues to fill the talent pipeline and get rid of the gap where 54 percent of Coloradans have a post-secondary credential, but 74 percent of our jobs will require one by 2020.

These young people represent a significant number of potential employees. Without figuring out how we can support them, our ability to maintain growth or make that growth more inclusive will slip away. It will take all sectors to improve their success – that means nonprofits, education, government and employers.
Challenges and Recommendations
Many organizations serve opportunity youth in Denver and most have systems for at least basic data collection. However, organizations rarely share data, often do not collect more than a small number of indicators and sometimes struggle to collect accurate data to use in impactful ways.

• The most complete data are around high school completion and youth served by WIOA funds.
• The biggest gaps in data for the opportunity youth population is for immigrants, the LGBTQ population and justice-involved youth.

For immigrants and the LGBTQ population, there are privacy and confidentiality concerns that make data collection more difficult. For justice-involved youth, the challenge is that the data currently being collected is focused on justice-related outcomes, but other background information such as education and employment status is not collected, nor is there any follow up on outcomes aside from recidivism rates. Collecting longitudinal or follow-up data on youth served is a major challenge.

All organizations serving Denver youth should collaboratively decide on a set of common measures to collect (at minimum, education and employment status) in order to have a better picture of the number of opportunity youth, who is serving them, and what their outcomes are as well as what are best practices in data collection and use. In an ideal world, there would be a common portal for the information and the information would be stored at the individual level so that reports could be pulled to disaggregate the data in different ways, shedding “real-time” light on challenges faced by youth.

For more recommendations on how you can engage on issues related to opportunity youth, see the Denver Opportunity Youth Policy Report “Opportunity Youth: A Touchstone for our state’s future”.

[denveroy.org/policy]

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