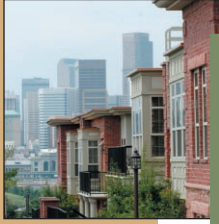


SPRING 2009



Our mission is to provide opportunities for children and their families to move from poverty and dependence to self-reliance.

The Piton Perspective

Connecting the Denver Community to Neighborhood Facts and Piton Foundation Programs

Report reveals college struggles for DPS graduates

Graduates from Denver Public Schools who enroll in college find it tough to stay the course, let alone finish with a degree. A new study – the first of its kind – reveals just 56% of graduates enroll in college; only 39% earn degrees or certificates within six years.

The findings are even more dismal for low-income students, who make up the majority of DPS' students. Only 45% of low-income students who graduate go on to college. Only 25% earn degrees within six years, according to the study tracking nearly 18,000 students who graduated from DPS between 2002 and 2007.

The study was conducted by The Piton Foundation in conjunction with the Denver Scholarship Foundation, the Pell Institute, and Denver Public Schools. It is the latest research conducted by Piton, which historically has used data and research to inform policymaking related to low-income children. (See page 7).

Among other key findings:

- Students who participate in accelerated high school classes enroll in college at higher rates than their peers. But fewer than half of all graduates, and only 34% of low-income graduates, had taken such classes.
- Of all accelerated classes, low-income students enroll in concurrent enrollment programs at the highest rate. 58% of low-income graduates who participated in a concurrent enrollment program enrolled in college, compared to 36% of poor students who did not participate.

Through this study, DPS is the first district in Colorado – and one of only a few major school systems nationally – to link K-12 data with postsecondary data to track student outcomes. DPS officials say they will use the new information to examine policies on improving postsecondary outcomes and encourage more students to take accelerated classes. Partners in the study also hope the state will use the tracking system built for the research to model a similar system statewide.



INSIDE THIS ISSUE



2
Piton's
Perspective



3
Graduates of DPS:
College Access



4
Graduates of DPS:
College Success



6
A Ladder to College:
Concurrent Enrollment



7
Piton Invests in Research
to Inform Education Policies
for Low-Income Children



8
Foundation
News

THE PITON FOUNDATION



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THE PITON FOUNDATION



THE COMMUNITY INVESTMENT DIVISION OF
GARY-WILLIAMS ENERGY CORPORATION



Piton's

P E R S P E C T I V E

Throughout The Piton Foundation's 30-year history, we have consistently used research to try to inform policymaking related to our focus on low-income children.

This latest research, highlighted in this issue of "The Piton Perspective," examines the postsecondary outcomes of graduates of Denver Public Schools. It was a collaborative effort with the Denver Scholarship Foundation, the Pell Institute, and DPS. We commend DPS officials for being on the cutting edge of efforts to track the progress of students after they leave high school. We also applaud them for their willingness to be public with the results.

Piton's purpose in conducting this research was twofold.

First, the foundation focuses much of its work on school reform, and we consider those efforts to include the years from preschool through postsecondary education. Extensive studies have shown the significant impact that vocational skills and postsecondary education have on adults' long-term earning potential. Piton currently is exploring ways we can most effectively use our resources to increase low-income Denver residents' access to and success in postsecondary education. This study illuminated the scope of the challenge ahead of us.

As the findings so clearly demonstrate, much improvement is needed. The percentage of low-income students going on to any kind of postsecondary education is far too small, just 45% of graduates. And for those that do, obtaining a certificate or degree is an elusive goal for all but one in four of them.

Officials from DPS have gone on record with their commitment to using this information to improve the district's success in preparing and sending its graduates to college. Their commitment includes increasing students' access to a variety of accelerated high school courses, including Advanced Placement and concurrent enrollment.

Piton had a second, and equally important, purpose for doing this research. Currently, no state database exists for tracking the postsecondary outcomes of Colorado's high school graduates. Through this research, DPS is the first district in the state, and one of only a few major school systems nationally, to link student-level

K-12 data with postsecondary data to measure the success of students after they graduate from high school.

Bringing these data systems together is vitally important. It enables school districts to set postsecondary goals for their students and measure progress toward these goals. Having richer and more inter-connected data on students also enables the K-12 and postsecondary systems to collectively identify where students are struggling and to develop strategies together to produce greater student academic success.

This research proves that it is possible to merge secondary and postsecondary data systems to track outcomes and use the results to change practices. And the timing for undertaking such an endeavor is fortuitous.

Through federal stimulus funding, millions of dollars are potentially available for innovative investments in education such as this. Dollars from what is known as the "Race to the Top" grant focus specifically on "better use of data to track students", schools' and educators' improvement" (including tracking students beyond high school), in addition to three other areas, ensuring quality teachers, creating international benchmark standards and assessments, and strategies for improving low-performing schools.

Creating such a statewide K-16 student tracking system would address the urgent need within Colorado and nationally for a standardized method of measuring educational outcomes after high school. Along with three other initiatives already underway in the state – Denver's alternative teacher compensation plan, the rewriting of academic standards from preschool through college, and the adoption of a testing system monitoring annual growth – this K-16 data innovation in Denver positions Colorado on the cutting edge of bold education reform.

All of these efforts will contribute to the success of all children who are educated in Colorado and, ultimately, to the future prosperity of our state.

Mary Gittings Cronin
President

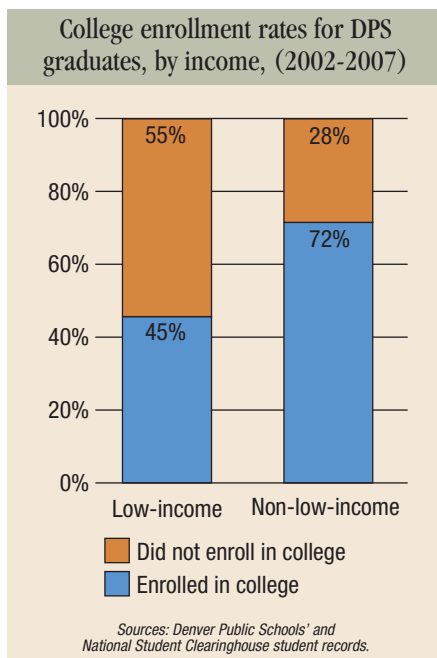
Graduates of Denver Public Schools: A Report on College Access and Success

A first-of-its-kind study tracking graduates of Denver Public Schools after high school shows that only 56% enrolled in college and far fewer earned a degree. The findings were even worse for students from low-income families, who make up the majority of DPS graduates.

Who goes to college?

Low-income students enrolled in college at much lower rates than their higher income peers.¹ Less than half (45%) of all low-income DPS graduates enrolled in college compared with nearly three-quarters (72%) of non low-income graduates.

In this section, college enrollment is defined as any enrollment, no matter how brief or how many years after graduating from high school. The percentages are based on the nearly 18,000 graduates from DPS between 2002 and 2007.



¹In this study, "low-income" refers to those DPS graduates who were eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch (FRL) program any time in their DPS career between 1996 and 2006. FRL is a federal program for families who live at 185% (or less) of the federal poverty level. For a family of four, this translated to \$39,000 a year (or less) in 2008. The majority of DPS families, however, qualify for a free lunch – which means a family of four earned \$28,620 or less in 2008.

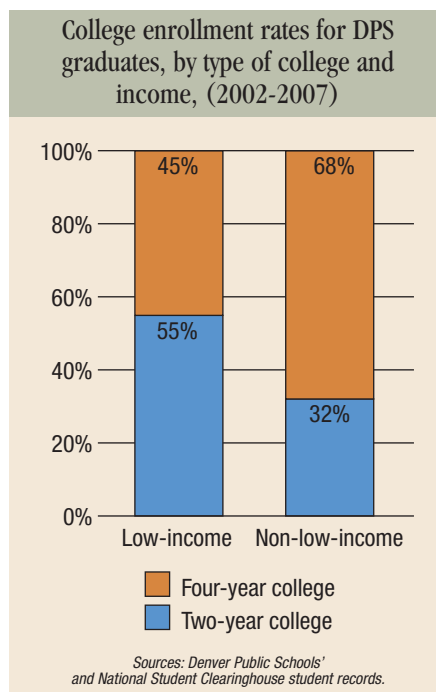
A closer look at the college enrollment patterns of low-income students over the six-year time span reveals that they may not enter college immediately after graduation from high school. Instead, they may begin college a year or more later.

In-state vs. out-of-state colleges

Most of the DPS students who go to college choose in-state institutions (72%), and more specifically stay within the Denver metropolitan area. If they are low-income, they remain in-state at a higher rate than their non low-income peers (80% vs 64%). The Community College of Denver and Metropolitan State College accounted for half (55%) of Denver metro-area college enrollments and one-third of all enrollments by DPS graduates who enrolled in college.

Two-year vs. four-year colleges

Among the DPS students who chose in-state colleges, large differences – depending on their



income – existed between whether they chose a two-year or a four-year college. Fifty-five percent of low-income graduates started at a two-year college versus 32% of non-low-income graduates.

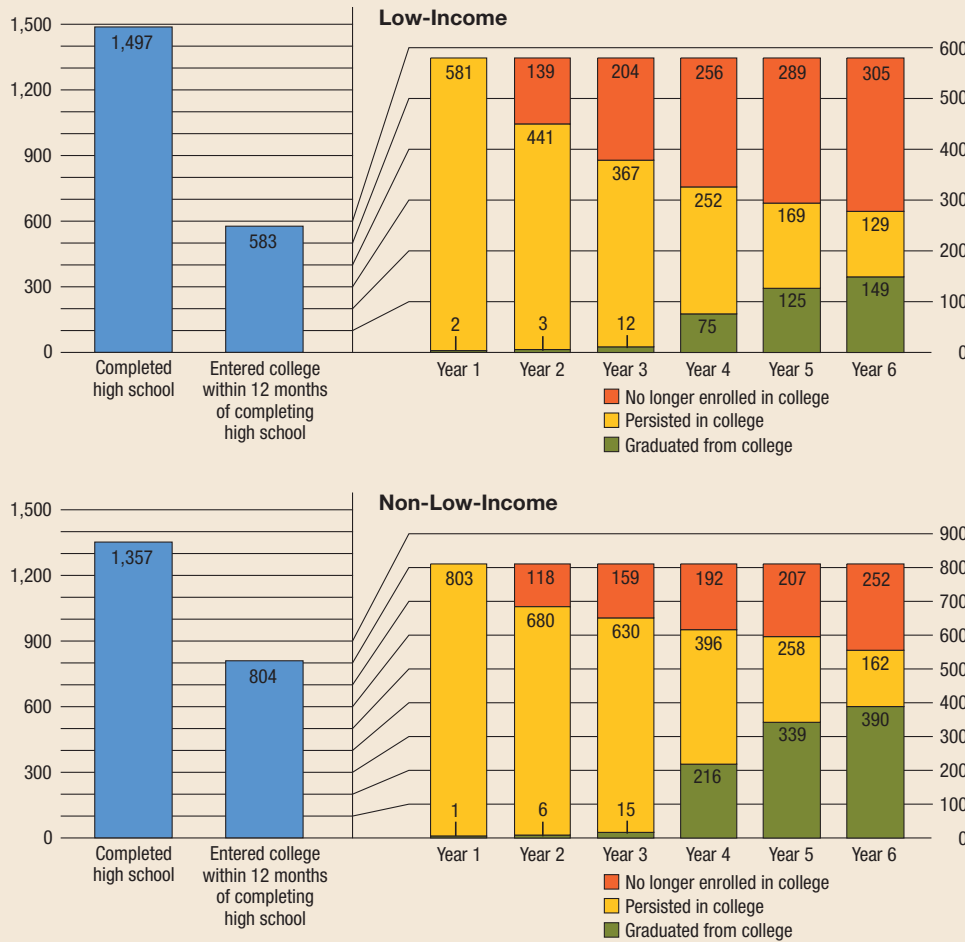
The world today requires that high school graduates transition seamlessly to postsecondary and workforce experiences. To understand the effectiveness of the state's public schools and make adjustments, we need a detailed, accurate picture of how well students are being prepared for their postsecondary experience. Making sure that the state systems are on the same page with data is a necessary step to ensure that the experience being provided for students is as seamless as possible.

Dwight D. Jones
Commissioner of Education

Who stays in college and who graduates?

As part of this study, researchers also looked at how successful DPS graduates were once they enrolled in college. Success was defined as remaining enrolled from one year to the next (persistence) or earning a degree or certificate (attainment). They specifically examined the persistence and attainment rates for the 1,387 students who graduated in the 2001-2002 academic year and enrolled in college within 12 months of graduation. They found

Outcomes for 2001-02 DPS graduates who entered college within 12 months of completing high school, by income



Sources: Denver Public Schools' and National Student Clearinghouse student records.

that 39% had attained a degree within six years. Another 21% were still enrolled in college, and 40% had dropped out.

Just as low-income DPS graduates entered college at substantially lower rates than their non-low-income peers, low-income students also had less success in college. Six years after entering college, only 26% of low-income DPS graduates who entered college had earned a certificate or degree versus 49% of the non-low-income college-goers.

These results reflect national college outcomes for low-income students. In general, low-income students take longer to complete degrees.² Low-income students may enroll part-time in order to work. In addition, they may leave college and

²J. Engle and V. Tinto, *Moving Beyond Access, College Success for Low-Income, First-Generation Students*, The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, Washington, DC, 2008. T. Mortenson, "Time to Degree: 1996-2004," *Postsecondary Educational Opportunity*, No. 189, March 2008.

The Study

In 2008, The Piton Foundation, the Denver Scholarship Foundation, and the Pell Institute undertook a study in conjunction with Denver Public Schools to learn how DPS graduates perform in college. The study looked at who enrolled in college, who persisted, and who earned a college degree or certificate. In addition, the research examined college entrance rates for DPS graduates who earned credit in one or more accelerated courses during high school. The study included about 18,000 students who graduated from DPS between 2002 and 2007.

Methodology

Student records for DPS graduates in six academic years, between 2002 and 2007, were matched with college enrollment data compiled by the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), an organization that collects student information from colleges and universities across the country. For the earliest graduating class (2001-2002), the study includes information on six years of possible college

enrollment. The linking of DPS-NSC student records yields one year of postsecondary information for the most recent class (2006-07 high school graduates). Reporting on postsecondary outcomes across these six groups of students, over one to six years, allowed for the identification of trends in college enrollment and completion for DPS graduates.

NSC data was used because Colorado had no unique identifier that allowed students to be tracked between the K-12 system and higher education. However, beginning in the current 2008-2009 academic year, the Colorado Department of Higher Education has started assigning students a number also used by CDE (known as the SASID). Four colleges are implementing use of the SASID – Metro, Western State, Fort Lewis, and Mesa State. As of 2009-10, the rest of Colorado's public colleges and universities will implement SASIDs.

Using NSC data, which goes back to 1993, also provided researchers with historical postsecondary data on high school graduates, providing up to six years of

return once or several times, lengthening the time to a degree. There also is evidence that they may change institutions or programs at higher rates than other students, which could increase the time to get a degree.³

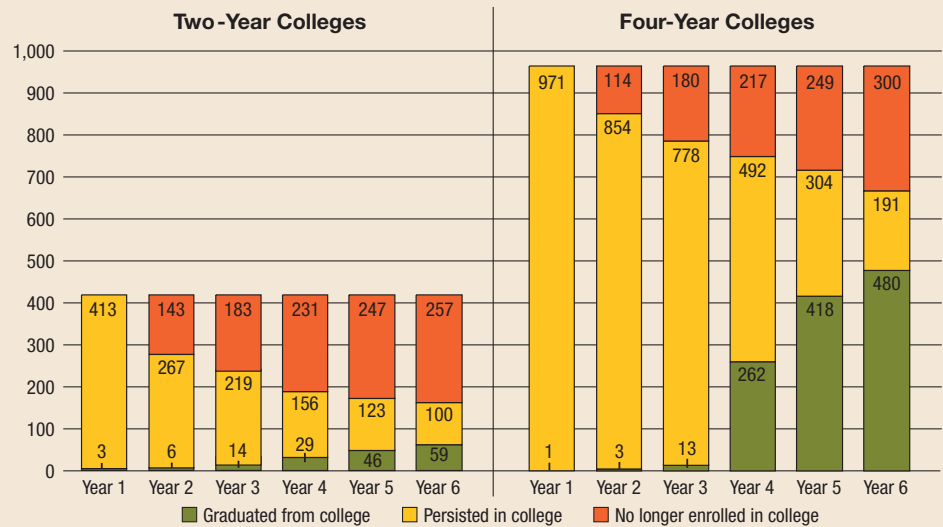
Two-year vs. four-year colleges

Overall, a much higher percentage of students who began postsecondary education at a four-year institution stayed in college and earned a degree or certificate. The rate is almost double that of students who began at a two-year college.

Again, researchers focused on DPS graduates from the earliest year (2001-02). By year six, only 14% of students who initially enrolled in a two-year college had completed a degree or certificate, compared with 49% of those who started at a four-year college.

³National Survey of Student Engagement, *Exploring Different Dimensions of Student Engagement: 2005 Annual Survey Results*, 2005

Outcomes (including enrollment, persistence and attainment/graduation) through the sixth year of possible enrollment for 2001-02 DPS graduates who entered college within 12 months of completing high school, by type of college initially enrolled



Sources: Denver Public Schools' and National Student Clearinghouse student records.

The ultimate measure of our schools' success is how well we prepare our students and lead them toward success in college and their careers. That's why we're committed to helping the state build a comprehensive data system that captures student progress from kindergarten through college. It helps us evaluate and improve the effectiveness of our programs to ensure that more and more of our students are graduating from high school with the skills and confidence they need to forge their own future.

Tom Boasberg
Superintendent of Denver Public Schools

possible college enrollment on DPS graduates. In addition, NSC data enabled DPS students to be tracked to out-of-state colleges. Further, NSC data allowed DPS to compare outcomes for its students with similar districts in the country that also use NSC to measure high school graduates' postsecondary performance.

Piton's Partners

The **Denver Scholarship Foundation (DSF)** is a source of financial assistance and guidance for Denver Public Schools' students who want to attend college. DSF offers need-based scholarships to qualifying graduates for attending 39 Colorado postsecondary institutions, including technical and community colleges, state colleges and universities, as well as private institutions. The scholarship, which can be as much as \$5,000 a year, is renewable for up to five years. In addition to its scholarship effort, the DSF aims to be a catalyst for bringing together Denver Public Schools, Colorado postsecondary institutions, and other college access providers to create conditions that improve college opportunities for Denver students.

Denver Public Schools (DPS) serves the residents of the City and County of Denver, Colorado; 55% of the school district is Latino, 18% is African American, and 23% is Anglo. Only 13 of the 100 largest school districts in the country, all of which are located in Texas, California, and Florida, have higher proportions of Latino students. Sixty-six percent of the district's students qualify for the free or reduced-price lunch program. The current student enrollment is 75,269. DPS is comprised of 152 schools – 68 elementary, 18 K-8, 16 middle, 15 high, 21 charter, 6 alternative, and 8 other.

The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, based in Washington, DC, conducts and disseminates research and policy analysis to encourage policymakers, educators, and the public to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for low-income, first-generation, and disabled college students.

For a copy of the full report, go to the publication section of The Piton Foundation's website, www.piton.org.

College Access and Success of Students in DPS Accelerated Programs

Another aspect to the study conducted by The Piton Foundation and its partners was to examine the college enrollment rates of DPS graduates who had participated in accelerated programs while in high school. The study found that DPS students who participated in these programs enrolled in college at higher rates than those who did not.

These programs provide high school students with the opportunity to take advanced courses and sometimes even earn college credit. Accelerated programs offered by DPS include: Advanced Placement (AP) courses, the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, honors classes, as well as several concurrent enrollment options, including the Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) and CU Succeed programs. (See side bar.)

Who participated in accelerated programs?

In examining the six years of data on DPS graduates, researchers found that 43% of the graduates participated in an accelerated program or course. Low-income students participated at lower rates, 34%, compared to students who were not low-income (57%).

Forty-eight percent of graduates who participated in accelerated programs enrolled in only one type of program. Nearly 75% of the DPS graduates in the study who participated in the concurrent enrollment program, and no other accelerated programs, were low-income.

Who enrolls in college?

The college enrollment rate for students who participated in any type of accelerated program was 76% compared to 41% for graduates who did not. Fifty-eight percent of low-income graduates who only participated in concurrent enrollment programs enrolled in college, compared to 36% of low-income students that did not participate.

This groundbreaking report provides the Denver Scholarship Foundation with a crucial baseline for measuring our success as we work to empower DPS students to attend and complete college.

Bernie Marquez

Chairwoman

*Denver Scholarship Foundation
board of directors*

Accelerated Programs in DPS

1. Advanced Placement (AP):

College-level classes taught at high schools by high school instructors. Students who pass AP exams are eligible to receive college credit.

2. Honors (“X”) Classes:

Accelerated classes offered by high schools to higher-achieving students.

3. International Baccalaureate (IB):

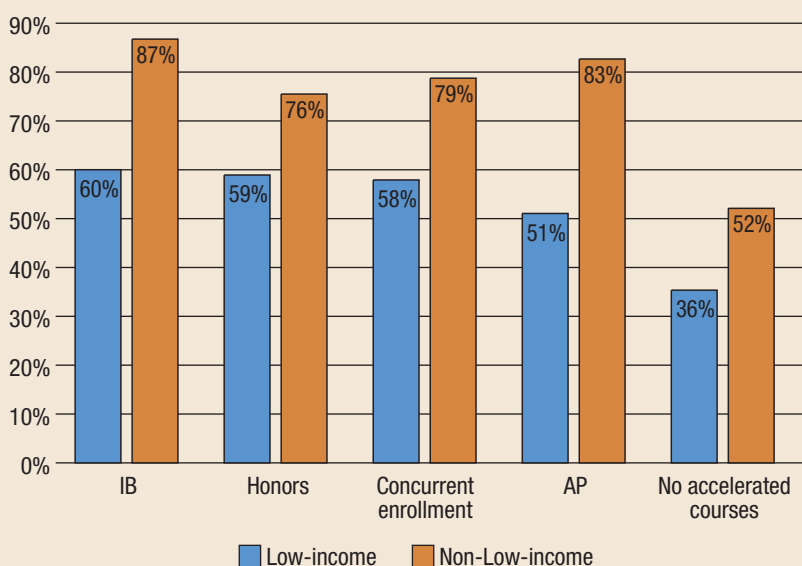
A two-year program of six courses, an extended essay and a community-action component for students 16 to 19 years of age, which leads to a high school diploma honored by universities internationally.

4. Concurrent enrollment programs.* Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO):

College classes that 11th- and 12th-grade students can take at colleges and receive both high school and college credit. **CU Succeed:** Courses taught at high schools by University of Colorado faculty or high school faculty certified by CU. **Fast Track:** College classes for 12th grade students who have fulfilled all graduation requirements.

*This study combines two DPS dual enrollment programs, Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) and CU Succeed, into one “concurrent enrollment” group. Fast Track had not been implemented in DPS at the time of the study.

College enrollment rates for students who enrolled in only one type of accelerated high school course or program, by income, (2002-2007)



Sources: Denver Public Schools' and National Student Clearinghouse student records.

Piton Invests in Research

TO INFORM POLICIES FOR LOW-INCOME CHILDREN

In addition to grant-making and the programs it operates, The Piton Foundation is concerned with public policy and its impact on low-income children and their families. Throughout its history, the foundation has conducted research and analysis, supported the research done by others, and published reports designed to inform policies that affect poor children. This work, we believe, lends credibility to the issues, provides critical information for informing policy strategies and solutions, and offers a powerful, unbiased perspective to public policy work.

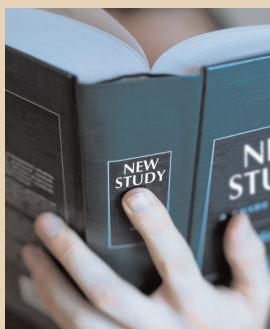
Historically, the foundation may be best known for its comprehensive reports on poverty in Denver, which are based on the U.S. Census. But over the years it has also conducted research and analysis related to child welfare, the uninsured, juvenile justice, and other issues relevant to disadvantaged families and children.

Most recently, Piton has engaged in numerous research projects designed to help shape policies that provide opportunities for low-income students to succeed. In addition to the research highlighted in this newsletter, which essentially closed the data gap between secondary and postsecondary institutions, Piton's current investments in research and data to inform education policymaking include:

1. The Colorado Growth Model

(<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeedserv/GrowthModelDistSchReport.htm>)

In 2007, Colorado began measuring school performance based on individual students' progress from year to year in the context of their academic peers. Called the "Growth Model," The Piton Foundation, in partnership with Colorado Commissioner of Education Dwight Jones and Deputy Commissioner Rich Wenning, provided significant investments in this project. Piton believes that Colorado's Growth Model will: 1) allow educators to track individual student achievement and to identify students at risk of falling behind or failing; and 2) streamline accountability systems, reporting and protocols, creating one measure to evaluate district accreditation, school accountability reports, and annual yearly progress, as required by the federal No Child Left Behind school accountability system. The Colorado Growth Model is being adopted by other states and is recognized by a wide variety of advocacy groups as an effective way to measure the value added by schools. Because strong accountability systems are such an important component of the federal Race to the Top grant, the Growth Model is likely to significantly improve Colorado's competitiveness.



2. DPS Employee Compensation: the Role of Pension Benefits

(www.piton.org/publications)

In 2008, the Piton and Donnell-Kay foundations took a close look at the Denver Public Schools' pension system, concluding that it, like many other teacher pension systems, may be ill-designed to recruit top quality new teachers or to retain the best senior ones. The resulting report looks specifically at the DPS pension plan, which can represent more than half of total compensation for

senior employees but little additional compensation for junior employees. The pension plan locks in funds that could otherwise be put toward alternative methods of recruiting, compensating, and retaining teachers – especially new hires who may not stay in the state or district for 30 years. The report shows that DPS' pension system, to an extent, works at cross purposes to its Professional Compensation (ProComp) pay system, which aims to pay teachers based on performance, not just seniority. Late last year,

district leaders revised ProComp, which is now among the first pay systems to modify its district-wide salary schedule to include increased compensation incentives for teachers who show student growth and serve in hard-to-staff positions in the hope of boosting recruitment efforts. This is a dramatic departure from a system that had historically paid teachers almost exclusively based on seniority.

3. Leaving to Learn

(www.piton.org/publications)

In 2007, The Piton Foundation, Denver Public Schools and the Rocky Mountain News jointly undertook an examination of how school choice is affecting DPS. It resulted in an award-winning series in the paper called *Leaving to Learn*. Our research found that more than 20,000 Denver children ages 5-17 seek their education outside of DPS, either in private or suburban schools. That's about a quarter of Denver's school-age children. Within the district, 40 percent of the children are choosing to go to a school other than their neighborhood school.

This research provided evidence of the flight of students out of DPS and made the case for why A+ Denver (a nonprofit, independent citizens' organization that provides DPS with oversight and broad-based experience from the business, civic and governmental communities) needed to develop principles and criteria for DPS and the DPS school board to use in making crucial decisions on school closures.



Foundation

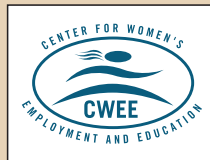
N E W S

Tax Help Colorado Files 1,351 Returns for Low-Income Taxpayers



Tax Help Colorado, a program of The Piton Foundation and Colorado's community colleges, filed tax returns for free for 1,351 low-income tax payers this past tax season. Four colleges – Aims Community College in Greeley, Community College of Aurora, Community College of Denver, and Morgan Community College in Fort Morgan – participated in the program, which is in its second year. Refunds received totaled more than \$2.3 million, including \$786,000 in Earned Income Tax Credits and \$436,000 in Child Tax Credits. Four additional community colleges will participate in Tax Help Colorado in the coming year.

Piton's Social Network Partnership Receives Award



The Denver Social Network Partnership, a coalition formed by The Piton Foundation, received an award from the Center for Work Education and Employment (CWEE). The Community Partner of the Year Award recognizes an outstanding collaborative venture that CWEE is involved with. CWEE is one member of this growing network of organizations that are committed to helping low-income families get ahead by building their social networks.

Employee Fund Focuses on Basic Human Needs



In response to the current economic crisis, the Gary-Williams Energy Corporation Employee Fund chose "providing basic human needs and promoting self-sufficiency" as its most recent focus. The fund awarded \$75,000 in grants to 10 groups, including Metro CareRing, COMPA Food Bank, The Delores Project, Mi Casa Resource Center, Inner City Health Center, The Gathering Place, Warren Village, The Women's Bean Project, CWEE and Dress for Success. The employee fund, which is administered by The Piton Foundation, was established in 1983 to foster awareness among company employees of the importance and rewards of community service.