



THE DENVER FOUNDATION

Communities Coming Together to Keep Kids in School and Learning:
The Denver Foundation's Learning Cohort to End the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The Denver Foundation is a community foundation created by and for the people of Denver as a place where people from all backgrounds and interests come together to take action in Metro Denver and beyond, today and for generations to come. Our community endowment gives us the resources to take action, make grants and exercise leadership on issues of greatest concern to the community. In this service, the community led us to prioritize work to ensure positive educational outcomes for all students.

For youth falling into the School-to-Prison Pipeline, these outcomes are out of reach.

In the Denver-Metro area and across the nation an alarming trend has developed wherein young people and particularly young men of color are being sent out of our school systems and into incarceration through what's become known as the School to Prison Pipeline. Statistics clearly lay out the path of this pipeline, often starting with a single school suspension. In the U.S., African-American young men are 3.5 times more likely to be suspended than Caucasian young men. Given that research shows that suspensions and repeated suspensions dramatically increase likelihood of dropout, it is not surprising that these disproportionate suspension rates correlate to disproportionate completion, with Black and Latino students twice as likely to not graduate high school. Many of these suspensions also disproportionately lead these youth to the justice system, with 70% of students involved in in-school arrests or referral to law enforcement identified as African-American or Latino, an even greater signifier of dropout. And we know that 68% of men in state and federal prison do not hold a high school diploma.

We have seen impressive movement to end this trend in Colorado, with changes to zero tolerance legislation, decreases in suspension disparities in some schools and districts, and growing understanding and support of these shifts. However, there is still significant work to be done. In the Denver-Metro area, we continue to see practices contributing to the School-to-Prison Pipeline and disparities in suspensions and other educational outcomes parallel those nationally. Community members, teachers, principals, and nonprofits are coming together with district leadership to take a bold stand against these factors. The Denver Foundation is honored to partner with the community in this important work to implement common sense discipline to keep kids in school and learning.

Significant policy wins are in place thanks to community leadership and the hard work of organizations such as TDF partner Padres y Jovenes Unidos. Parents, youth, and teachers are now seeking the help they need in order to make the promise of these policies a reality in their schools. The right resources along with high quality training and support for educators, families, and students are essential. Success depends on a thoughtful and strong focus on implementation in schools.

The Denver Foundation's Learning Cohort to End the School to Prison Pipeline was designed and launched to meet this need. Focused on high quality implementation, these fifteen schools along with select non-profits, community leaders and organizers, and our Restorative Justice partners engage in deep collaboration to implement:

- Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices in schools
- Culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices
- Socio-emotional learning
- Engaging families as partners and equitable leaders in the work
- A common focus on equity, including deliberate and formative use of data
- A common focus on collaboration among parents, students, educators, and support organizations
- A common focus on uncovering and addressing underlying causes of suspensions and the STPP
- Video documentation to record and share the stories within, behind, and of the work

All efforts include a strong focus on inclusiveness and resident engagement, engaging parents as equitable partners and leaders, with the support of The Denver Foundation's powerful Strengthening Neighborhoods group. Intensive facilitation and evaluation support for the project allows the Foundation and our partner organizations, families, and schools to share what is working and what isn't, for continuous learning and greater impact. And schools, families, and youth open their doors and their hearts, sharing their stories through a documentary video of the project to be shared with the larger community.

The Denver Foundation is honored to support this community driven initiative and looks forward to ongoing efforts for common sense discipline to keep kids in school and learning, coming together to end the School to Prison Pipeline and ensure positive educational outcomes for all students.

Unlocking the Future: We Rise

A collaborative creation of The Denver Foundation's Learning Cohort to End the School to Prison Pipeline

Hey! Our future
Let's take the time to
Know each other

Children, children everywhere
Needing to be known, seen and heard
Dialogue takes isolation to liberation

Poverty trauma language
Hear my voice
Relationships are important
I want success

Homeless, illiteracy, incarceration
Poverty of circumstances
Why not me?
Empowering adults in student lives
Does my race matter here?
Give me tools
Bring success to a nation

Isolation, no access
Freed by finding liberation
Dialogue brings leadership

Home; scary, stress, impossible
School; racism, threats, bullies
Answer? Compassion
Understanding
Poverty, language, trauma
Self-concept isolates me
Something must change!
Let freedom reflect through all

To know me is to discover value
And much more

Accept one's self
Do not fear the unknown
Start, change, succeed

Mistrust, hopelessness, powerlessness
No match to the keys
Purpose, acceptance, love

No longer disappearing, oppression and despairing
I take a look, accepting the keys
Perseverance opens the heart, mind and will
And we rise (Dear Maya)
We rise