

The Denver Post

Report cites "horrific" DPS dropout rate

http://www.denverpost.com/education/ci_13673163

By Jeremy P. Meyer

October 30, 2009

More than half of Denver Public Schools students who start the ninth grade do not graduate in four years, a trend that will take a concerted effort to reverse, according to a report released Thursday.

The report by the Donnell-Kay Foundation found that 3,600 students drop out of DPS each year and that among the more than 7,500 who fall behind on the four-year graduation track, 42 percent are at risk of dropping out later.

"The numbers are horrific," said Tony Lewis, director of the Donnell-Kay Foundation. "We don't see any real plan to prevent kids from dropping out and nothing to get those kids back."

DPS officials say they know the district has a problem and they are trying to solve it.

Next fall, DPS will open its first "multiple pathways" center to work with students who are short credits toward graduation, or who have dropped out, DPS Superintendent Tom Boasberg said.

"To meet the needs of these students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out, (these schools) requires significant additional per-pupil resources," Boasberg said. "We look forward to working with the state on the resource question."

The Donnell-Kay report urges DPS to create a portfolio of high-quality options and policies to ensure the success of all secondary students. These policies should particularly focus on areas in the district where the dropout rate is high, such as the far northeast and the southwest.

"You need a really thoughtful plan to attack both ends of the problem — the kids who have dropped out and the kids who are at risk of dropping out," Lewis said. "A generalized center in one area won't work. It needs to be super-specific."

The report offers a plan for the district: analyze data about the off-track student population; put in prevention systems to catch kids before they drop out; improve the system to get off-track students back on track to graduate; do outreach to re-engage youth who have dropped out; and implement a 100 percent graduation policy.

Steve Dobo, director of Colorado Youth for a Change, believes the dropout problem and graduation crisis can be solved.

"I think we have come up with a system — helping dropouts who have already left and working upstream to stop the pipeline of dropouts with prevention with early warning systems," Dobo said. "I'm convinced that it is solvable."

Jeremy P. Meyer: 303-954-1367 or jpmeyer@denverpost.com