



Annual Report

2019-2020



Dear Friends,

In the fall of 2011, the D2 Center officially opened its doors to disengaged youth in the community as Omaha's first and only reengagement center. These youth are not in school, are in the process of disengaging from school, or are off-track to graduate from high school on time. The core philosophy of the D2 Center is that every young person matters, no matter what their circumstances or what traumatic events have disrupted their lives, and everyone needs that basic credential for a better future—the high school diploma. The key to getting back on track or back in school is to provide each youth a caring adult who has access to support the student may need. At the D2 Center we call them Youth Academic Navigators (YANs), and they are at the heart of the D2 Center program. The D2 Center also provides certified tutors, elective credit opportunities, and Career Navigators to assist students with postsecondary planning and connections before and after they graduate. The D2 Center continues to do dropout reengagement in partnership with Omaha Public Schools (OPS).

The current pandemic created unique challenges in the final quarter of 2019-20. The closing of schools and social distancing hindered student progress and D2 Center growth and progress as well. Despite these challenges, the D2 Center:

- Served 339 students in the YAN program; sixty-three graduated from high school.
- Did outreach to 210 OPS students who had dropped out of high school. Fourteen of these students have already graduated from high school and many more are still enrolled.
- Assisted an additional fifty-two OPS students who attended alternative programs. Career Navigators provided postsecondary career planning, job searches, training, and educational opportunities.
- Offered elective credit opportunities from certified teachers; nineteen students earned an elective credit and thirty students were enrolled remotely during the summer of 2020 in a special partnership with OPS.
- Provided tutoring to thirty-nine students on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons a total of 152 times.

As the new school year unfolds, the challenges are greater than ever. The D2 Center has responded and will continue to respond in the weeks and months ahead. When schools closed in March, YANs focused on contacting their students and encouraging them to continue doing schoolwork in order to improve third quarter grades or bring failing grades up to passing. YANs, who each have an area of community expertise, remained vigilant in staying abreast of the changing landscape of resources in the community and connecting their students and families to these resources. D2 Center staff members developed a new elective credit class and formed a partnership with Omaha Public Schools to offer three credit opportunities in the summer for students. The result was the most successful D2 Center summer program of the past nine years.

We appreciate the ongoing support of the City of Omaha, United Way of the Midlands, The Sherwood Foundation, and the Weitz Family Foundation that is so critical to our mission. We place a high value on the support we get from individuals like you in the community, who understand that every young person counts and needs to earn a diploma to be on a pathway to a better future. Please follow us on Facebook and Twitter or visit our website at www.d2center.org.

Jerry Bexten
PRESIDENT, BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Greg Emmel
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Carolyn T. Miller
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



D2 Center Staff

EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Greg Emmel
Carolyn T. Miller

INTAKE SPECIALIST

Charnella Mims

STAFF SPECIALIST

Jodie Martinez

CAREER NAVIGATORS

Bette Norton Ball
John Moore

YOUTH ACADEMIC NAVIGATORS

Jesi DeWitt
Hansel Gonzalez
Evelia Gutiérrez
Kelsey Hansen
Olga Yaneth López
Curtis Morgan
Netta Prince

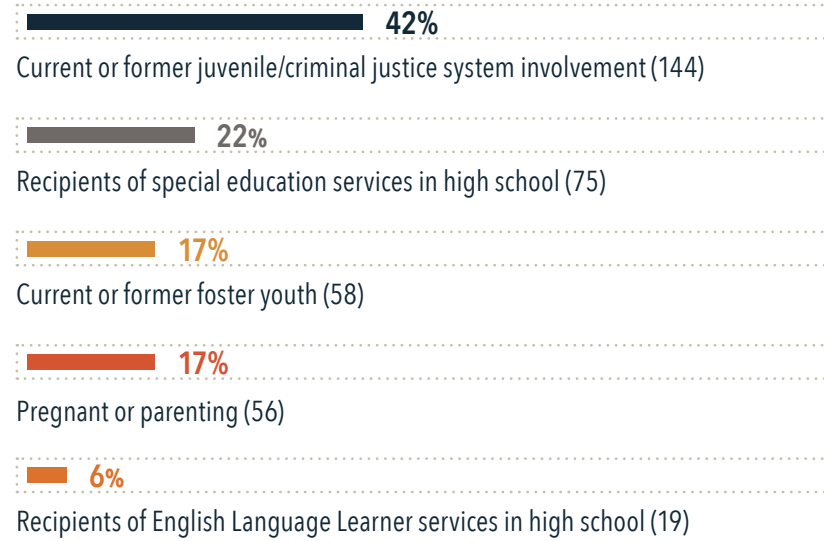
PART-TIME CERTIFIED TEACHERS

Clem Bell
Dianne Kielniarz
Kathy Kocsis
Terry Kocsis
Jackie Thomas

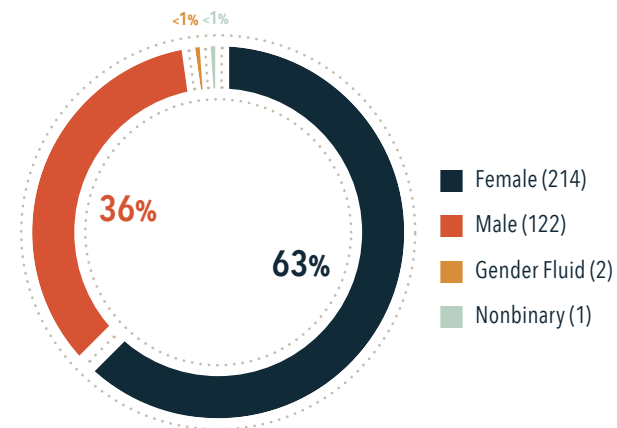
D2 Center Student Snapshot

339
TOTAL
STUDENTS

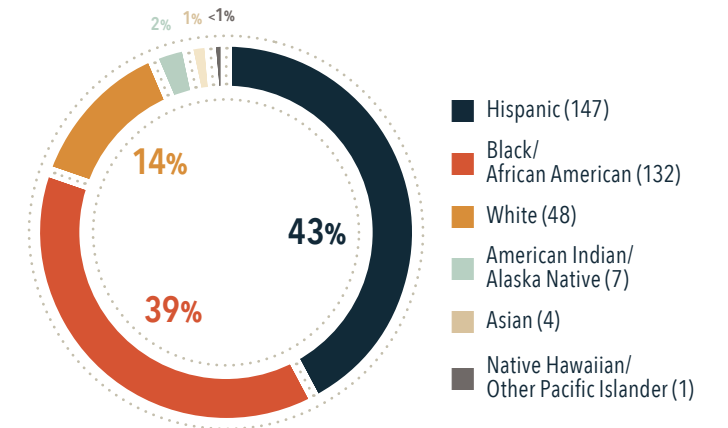
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO ARE:



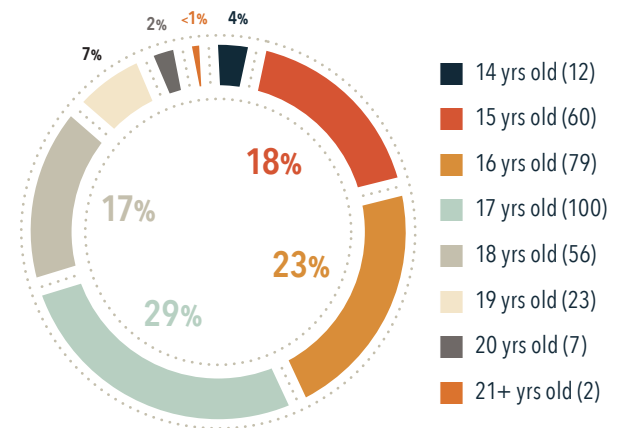
STUDENT GENDER



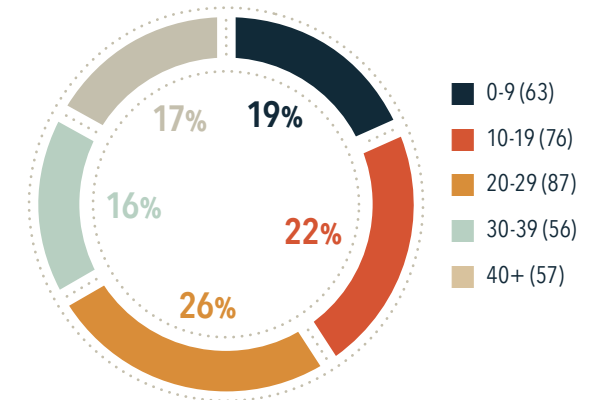
STUDENT RACE/ETHNICITY



STUDENT AGE AT INTAKE



NUMBER OF HIGH SCHOOL CREDITS AT INTAKE



Abraham's Story:

"I Have Become An Optimistic Person"

The year Abraham started kindergarten at Indian Hill Elementary his mother was deported to El Salvador. He never knew his father. He remembers being on the auditorium stage at the end of the Christmas concert watching the other kids greeting their parents. He waved to the crowd with a fake smile pretending his parents were there. Thankfully, his grandparents took him in, but he has always longed to be with his mother and has fought feelings of loneliness and depression. After his 4th grade year it was decided he would live with his mother in El Salvador, but after three years both he and his mother realized he would have better opportunities if he returned to Omaha. However, he became rebellious after moving back and wouldn't listen to anyone. This led to negative choices including gangs, drugs, truancy, and alcohol.

He was expelled in high school two times. After the second expulsion his mother told him to go ahead and drop out if he didn't care. "Then just wait and see where you end up." Although she was far away, he still had hopes they would someday be together again as a family. Abraham

thought of his friend who had died and the look on his friend's mother's face when she looked at him in a casket. Perhaps he was finally ready for a change in his life. In the spring of 2019 when he was at his second orientation for the Parrish Expelled Student Program, he met Youth Academic Navigator Hansel Gonzalez who was attending the orientation and talking about the D2 Center program. Abraham decided to sign up and Hansel became his YAN. During the first month Hansel made a home visit and met Abraham's grandmother. Hansel visited him at Parrish and they talked about his summer school plans, his job at the zoo, and his vehicle. Hansel noted, "Abraham knows everything about the inner workings of a vehicle and is working on his vehicle constantly. I praised him for his knowledge and told him he can definitely have a future in that industry."

Abraham was placed at Blackburn Alternative High School for what hopefully would be his final year of high school. His attendance at Parrish and Blackburn was better, and his grades in school improved. He was starting to see a future for himself and realized that even though they weren't together, he needed to be a role model for his younger siblings in El Salvador. During his final semester at Blackburn, D2 Center Career Navigator John Moore was there every Wednesday morning working with seniors on postsecondary planning. Mr. Moore helped Abraham prepare a resume, apply for part-time jobs, apply to Metropolitan Community College (MCC) in diesel mechanics, complete his FAFSA, and apply for a scholarship. He set up an appointment for him in the financial aid office and Hansel went with him. Abraham was proud to be awarded the MCC Johnny Rodgers scholarship, and he started at MCC in the fall of 2020. He plans to become a diesel mechanic.

In Abraham's own words "Not having a mother's warmth is very cold. Especially when almost every day you are alone. There is nothing you can do but try to make the best out of what you are pursuing...Over time I noticed that I have become an optimistic person and...have a plan for my future. In order to achieve anything in life you must work very hard to be rewarded. My goal is to have my education completed at MCC, be working in a job as a diesel mechanic, and be in a position financially so I can bring my mom back to the US and sponsor her path toward citizenship."



Pandemic Partnership

The D2 Center partnered with the Omaha Public Schools in the summer of 2020 to offer three classes to supplement OPS virtual summer classes. For the past nine years, D2 Center teachers have offered two elective credit classes to D2 Center students in the summer. This summer was a bit different. Due to the pandemic and closing of schools, OPS summer school was limited mostly to seniors and a few juniors. The extra classes offered at the D2 Center allowed a few OPS and D2 Center seniors the opportunity to earn enough credits to either graduate or move closer to graduation. The classes were also available to other interested D2 Center students. All three D2 Center classes were taught remotely utilizing Zoom meetings, cell phone, and email. A new summer class, "Navigating Your Future," was developed during the pandemic and taught by several D2 Center staff members: teachers Clem Bell, Jodie Martinez, Terry and Kathy Kocsis, and Career Navigators John Moore and Bette Norton Ball. OPS Director of Multiple Pathways, Dr. Shari Koch, played a key role in the partnership. She sent a note of thanks to the D2 Center staff.

"Thank you for your partnership in so many ways, but recently through the summer credit program which just concluded. Grades submitted have now posted to student transcripts. Please find below a summary:

D2 Center Program Partnership:

- 7 graduates
- 28 credits earned
- 30 enrollees

Note: D2 Center credit earners were often students who had low credit thresholds and did not engage previously during the spring shut down.

"You make a difference, especially to students who need it the most. Again, thank you on behalf of OPS and our students for your efforts!"

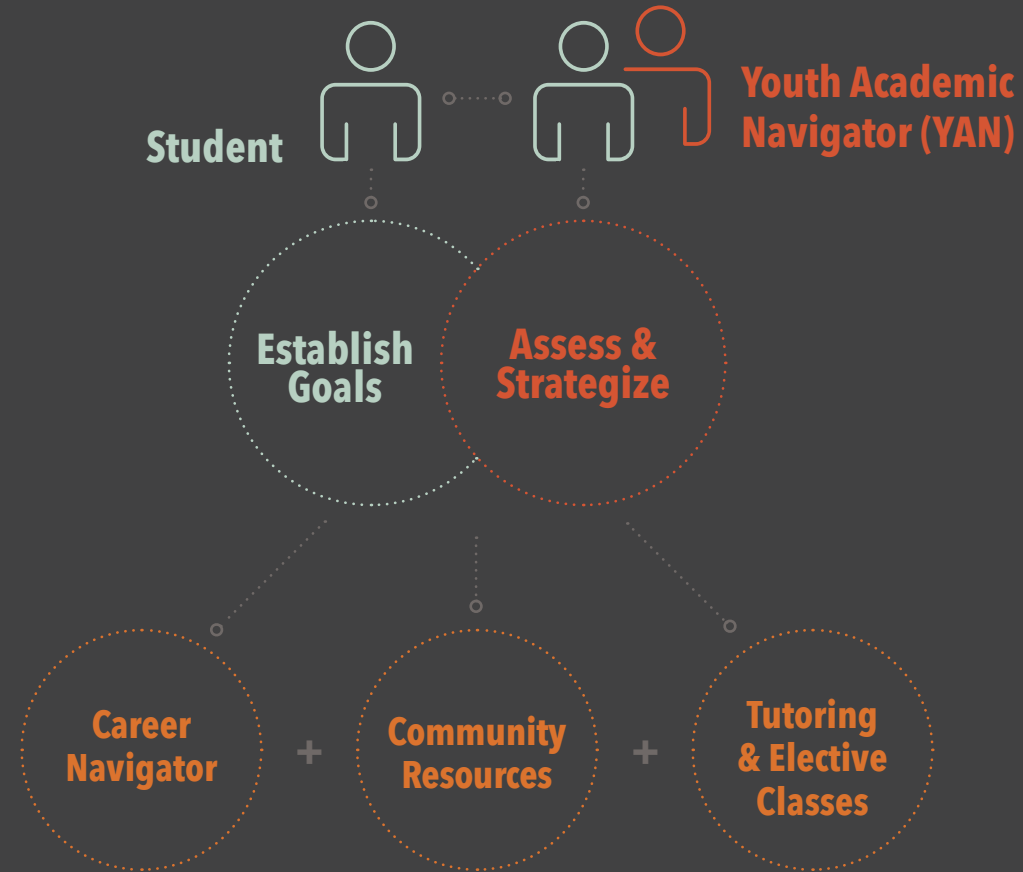
The D2 Center thanks Dr. Koch and the many OPS staff members and teachers who provided opportunities for students to earn credits in the summer of 2020 during challenging times. It was a great team effort!

How Students Connect With D2 Center

- Omaha Public Schools**
(and other school districts)

Via Social Workers,
Guidance Counselors, etc.
- Student/Family**
- Community/Programs**

Via DC Juvenile Services, St. Francis
Ministries, NECC Teen & Young Parent



IDEAL OUTCOMES

- 
Reengagement
- 
Graduation
- 
**Postsecondary/
Career**

Shayla's Story: "I Couldn't Have Done This Without You"

Shayla dropped out of high school in the spring of her senior year still needing 16 credits. After repeatedly calling every contact number she had for Shayla, Reengagement Specialist / Youth Academic Navigator (YAN) Kelsey Hansen made a home visit. She had one goal in mind: to get Shayla reenrolled in school in August so she could graduate. Leaving her business card with Shayla's mother's boyfriend, Kelsey hoped she could finally connect with her. Thankfully, Shayla reached out and the two agreed to meet.

Shayla opened up to Kelsey right away. Since dropping out of high school, she experienced life-changing challenges. She made new friends, but they turned out to be the wrong kind. She had been incarcerated and had gotten pregnant. Her future was uncertain, and she didn't have the family support necessary to help her rise above the challenges.

Kelsey knew what she needed to do. Shayla needed a positive support system to finish school, so Kelsey connected her with the Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative's Teen and Young Parent Program. In the program, Shayla had access to the resources she needed most for herself and her baby. She was assigned a parent coach and was set up to receive proper pre- and post-natal care.

Kelsey also helped Shayla with reenrolling in school. She joined the Omaha Public Schools Independent Studies Program (ISP), but other issues began to surface. She had her baby and soon had struggles with childcare, finding employment, and transportation. Although she enrolled in ISP again the following year, more problems appeared, this time including depression and housing instability.

After another unsuccessful attempt at ISP, Shayla agreed to apply to the D2 Center program. She was accepted, and naturally, Kelsey became her Youth Academic Navigator. After months of making little progress in school, things began to turn around for her.

Shayla found reliable childcare, got a second part-time job, and was able to afford a car. As a new school year was about to begin, she knew, because of her age (and reminders from Kelsey), that this school year would be her last chance to earn her diploma. Kelsey stayed in close contact with her during the year, providing support and encouragement as Shayla began to finally earn some credits through the ISP and Accelerere programs.

By summer, Shayla had made progress, but still needed credits. She began experiencing obstacles again with unreliable childcare and transportation. But Kelsey and the D2 Center were there to ensure those obstacles didn't interfere with Shayla's goal to graduate. During this final push to complete school, Kelsey remained in close contact with Shayla and her teachers. She made sure Shayla was in the right classes, was making progress and doing everything she could to earn credits. As the last summer class session at Accelerere was winding down in July, Shayla was on track to finish on time, and her seven-year journey to earn a high school diploma was nearly over.

Shayla's commencement ceremony was held in a packed auditorium in July. Dr. Shari Koch, program director at Accelerere, was so impressed with Shayla's unique story of perseverance and overcoming obstacles that she asked Shayla to deliver her inspirational story in a commencement speech.

Shayla recounted her story to the crowded auditorium full of graduating seniors and their family members. At times, she fought back tears as she told the crowd about the continued obstacles that almost prevented her from succeeding. As she thanked the staff at Accelerere, Kelsey, and the D2 Center, she said, "I couldn't have done this without you."



Where We Started

Planning for a reengagement center in Omaha began in 2010 when nonprofit Building Bright Futures hired directors Greg Emmel and Carolyn Miller to develop the program. The Sherwood Foundation provided startup funding and commissioned The Parthenon Group to research Omaha Public Schools (OPS) dropout and off-track student populations. At the time, reengagement centers were popping up across the U.S. from Boston to Portland. These early organizations shared structural models and best practices that helped shape the early phases of what would become the D2 Center. This group formalized as the National League of Cities Reengagement Center Network and, to this day, continues to expand.



2011

In 2011, we officially opened as the D2 Center. The two D's stand for Directions and Diploma: students heading in the wrong direction might need new directions to get back on track toward earning their diploma. That first summer we offered two elective credit classes to a small group of students and piloted what would become the cornerstone of our services, the Youth Academic Navigator (YAN) program. By the next year, 100 students would be active in the program and the first few would graduate. The staff doubled to four employees; in addition to the two directors, a Careers and Community Engagement (C & CE) Coordinator and intake specialist were hired.

2014-2015

The D2 Center Board of Directors met for the first time in 2014, our 501(c)(3) nonprofit status was granted, and the D2 Center became a standalone organization. By 2015, more than 300 students had been served and over 100 students had graduated. Four YANs and several part-time teachers were added to the staff.

2016-2017

In 2016, we signed the D2 Center Services Agreement with OPS for dropout reengagement and began proactive outreach to district students who had left school and were eligible to reenroll. By 2017 we had served 600 students with over 200 graduates. The C & CE program evolved into the Career Navigator program and began a new partnership with OPS alternative programs for postsecondary assistance, including students not in the full D2 Center program.

2018

Three hundred students were served and 75 graduated in 2018 - a milestone year for us. Our staff grew to meet increasing needs, with two directors, seven YANs, and eight part-time employees: one intake specialist, two Career Navigators, and five teachers.

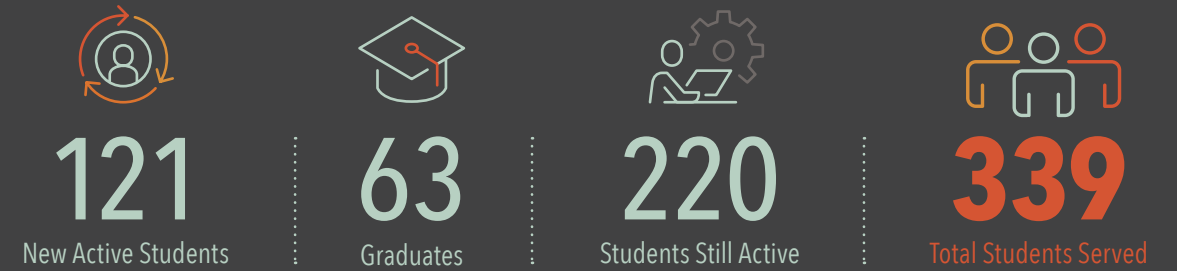
2019

By mid-2019, nearly 900 students had been served in the full program with 348 total graduates. An additional 200+ OPS alternative education students were served in the Career Navigator program, and we did outreach to over 500 additional students through the OPS/D2 Center Reengagement Project. In October 2019, we celebrated our 5-year anniversary as a nonprofit with a pub trivia night that drew over 200 attendees. The event was a huge success and raised over \$25,000!

2020

This brings us to 2020, a year with exceptional challenges. Despite the pandemic, we have served over 300 students and 43 have graduated. We continue to engage our students remotely. Our staff of nine full-time and nine part-time employees are focusing on health, safety, reengagement, and education - and we are finding creative ways to enhance our services and further support our students virtually, from YAN support to career navigation to tutoring and elective credit classes.

YOUTH ACADEMIC NAVIGATORS

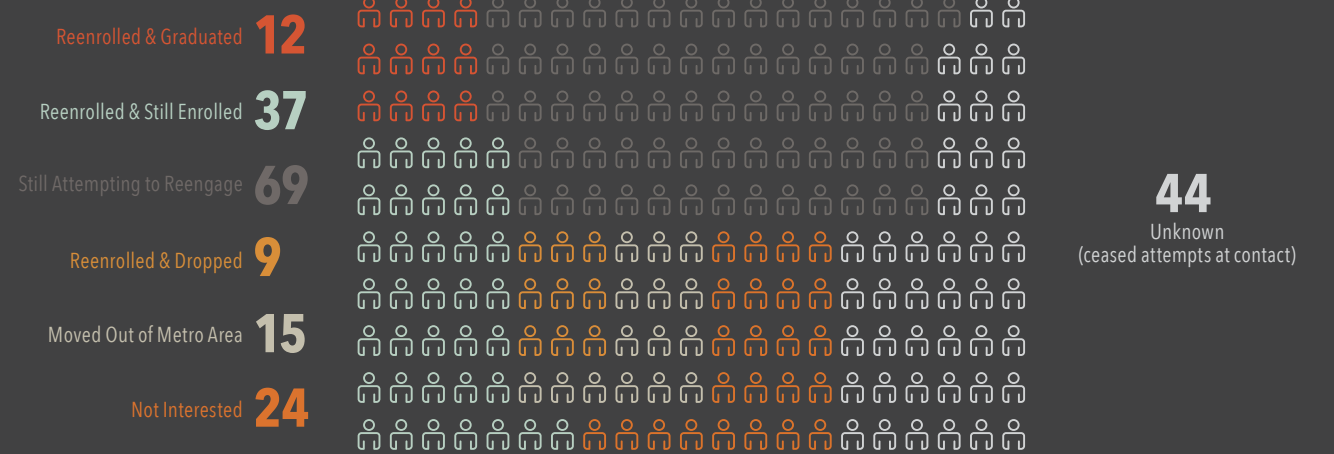


CAREER NAVIGATOR

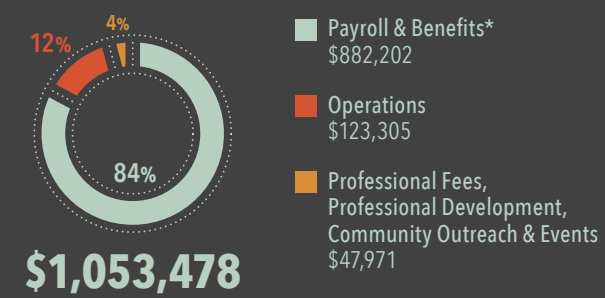


REENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST

210 Students Contacted

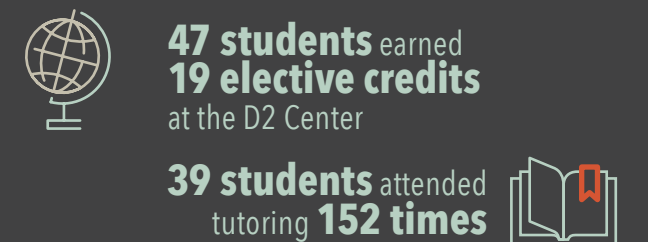


EXPENDITURES



*Full-time Staff - 9 Part-time Staff - 9

ELECTIVE CREDIT CLASSES & TUTORING



Board of Directors

Dr. Jerry M. Barteo, Community Advocate

Mr. Jerry Bexten, Director of Education Initiatives
The Sherwood Foundation

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Metropolitan Community College

Mrs. Susan Christopherson, Director of Secondary Education
Omaha Public Schools

Mr. Greg Emmel, Executive Director
D2 Center

Mr. Dominique McDaniel, Young Adult Representative

Ms. Lauren Micek Vargas, Executive Director
Education Rights Council

Ms. Carolyn T. Miller, Executive Director
D2 Center

Mr. Daniel Padilla, Executive Director
Lending Link Omaha

Dr. Katie Weitz, Executive Director
Weitz Family Foundation



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