



# Annual Report

2021-2022





# Dear Friends,

The D2 Center piloted its Youth Academic Navigator Program in 2011 and has been serving disengaged high school youth in the Omaha community since that time. In 2016, the Omaha Public Schools/D2 Center Reengagement Project services agreement was signed, and since that time, the D2 Center has partnered with OPS staff members to reach out to students who have withdrawn from school but are eligible to reenroll. As Omaha's only reengagement center, the D2 Center's primary goals are to get students back into school, keep them in school, and support them in earning their high school diploma.

Increasing challenges of school disengagement caused by the pandemic in 2020 and 2021 led to a strong D2 Center response to work harder than ever to help students stay engaged and earn their diploma. We set an ambitious goal in the summer of 2021 to have at least 100 of our students graduate from high school in the 2021-22 school year: The 100 Diploma Challenge. We are excited that the efforts of our students and staff paid off, and we had 120 students earn a diploma who were being served either in the YAN program or Reengagement Project! It truly was a record setting year:

- 83 students graduated in the YAN program and 197 students were newly activated into the program.
- 381 students were served in the Reengagement Project and 49 graduated by the summer of 2022.
- 35 students earned 41 elective credits working with our Nebraska-certified teachers.
- 179 students received postsecondary assistance in our Career Navigator program.

We believe that no matter the life circumstances or the traumatic events that may have impacted their lives, each one of our youths served is important, and getting a high school diploma is a basic credential for a better future. The economic and social benefits to young people and our community are great: higher annual earnings, a decreased taxpayer burden, less un/under employment, better health, lower crime rates, less poverty, and more civic engagement to name a few. A high school diploma can be a springboard to postsecondary training programs, postsecondary degrees, living-wage jobs, and the military.

Our thanks to The Sherwood Foundation, the Weitz Family Foundation, United Way of the Midlands, and the City of Omaha for their ongoing support. We appreciate the support from individuals in the community like you, who also understand that every young person counts, and a high school diploma is a pathway to a better future. Please follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn or visit our website at [www.d2center.org](http://www.d2center.org).

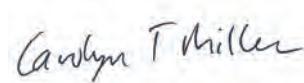
Sincerely,



Jerry Bexten  
PRESIDENT, BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Greg Emmel  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS



Carolyn T. Miller  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS



## D2 Center Staff

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Greg Emmel  
Carolyn T. Miller

### STAFF SPECIALIST

Jodie Martinez

### CAREER NAVIGATORS

John Moore  
Bette Norton Ball

### YOUTH ACADEMIC NAVIGATORS

Jesi DeWitt  
Abraham Gómez Meza  
Hansel Gonzalez  
Evelia Gutiérrez

Kelsey Hansen  
Olga Yaneth Mares  
Curtis Morgan  
Netta Prince

### PART-TIME CERTIFIED TEACHERS

Clem Bell  
Kathy Kocsis

Terry Kocsis  
Jackie Thomas





The **mission** of the D2 Center is to connect out-of-school and disengaged youth ages fifteen to twenty-one **into an educational pathway.**

## Reengagement: Renewing the Journey

In 2016, Omaha Public Schools (OPS) and the D2 Center (D2C) entered a service agreement called the OPS/D2C Reengagement Project. The agreement allows for information sharing and direct D2C outreach to high school students who have withdrawn from school but are eligible to enroll.

Through this partnership, OPS and D2C staff members work together to find, reenroll, and support these students. D2C Youth Academic Navigators (YANs) and Career Navigators contact targeted OPS students through phone calls to them and relatives, text messages, emails, home visits, Facebook messages, and letters.

The goal is to get as many of these students as possible to reenroll and renew their journey toward a high school diploma. D2C staff members discuss barriers and school options and help with enrollment as needed. These students also can take part in the full D2C YAN program, if they are interested. However, some students who reenroll drop out again, and the process starts over.

Annually, hundreds of Omaha students drop out of high school or do not earn their diploma in four years. For students who have experienced failure in

the traditional high school, they may not fare as well in crowded hallways and cafeterias, large classrooms, and with the increased social and emotional “drama” that comes naturally with large numbers of students being in the same place at the same time.

**[These students] are looking for alternative options to earn their diploma in smaller programs with more individual attention, flexible hours, and [they] can take fewer credits at a time.**

The fact is very few students not graduating in four years choose to return to their traditional high school. They are looking for alternative options to earn their diploma in smaller programs where they get more individual attention, have flexible hours, and can take fewer credits at a time.

The robust array of OPS alternatives called Multiple Pathways (MP) Programs not only provide smaller learning environments for students but also multiple

“on ramps” throughout the year rather than only at the semester. Students attend MP Programs for a variety of reasons, but they are generally off track to graduate on time and need more flexibility than the traditional school can provide.

About half the students served in MP Programs are still in their original four years but they have encountered barriers to being successful such as pregnancy/parenting, anxiety/depression, other health issues, family or personal issues, or needing to work to support themselves or their family. A large majority of the students served in MP Programs have experienced childhood trauma, are ethnic minorities, and live in disadvantaged areas of Omaha.

**D2C outreach numbers increased by 40% to 347 students served in 2020-21 and saw an additional 10% increase to 381 students in 2021-22 – both all-time highs for the Reengagement Project.**

The pandemic had a negative impact on graduation rates and the number of students attending school or graduating on time. The response has been an increased focus on the OPS/D2C partnership to reengage these students.

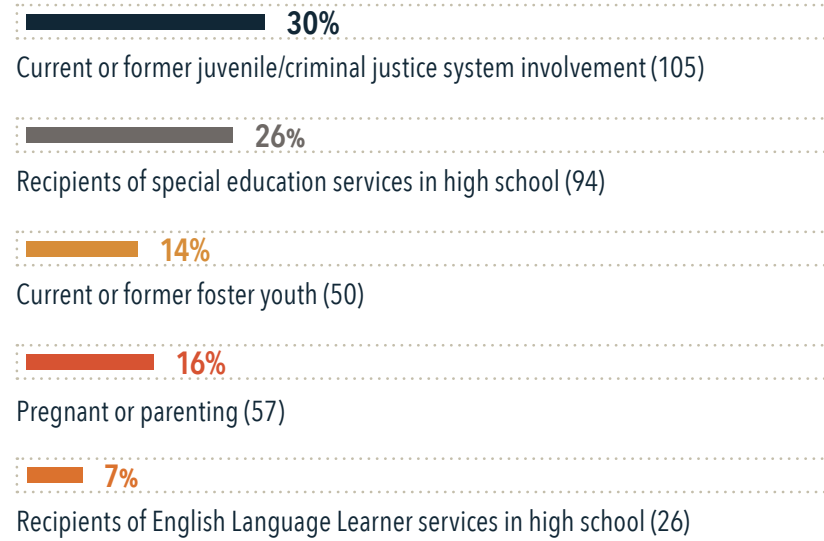
D2C outreach numbers increased by 40% to 347 students served in 2020-21 and an additional 10% to 381 students in 2021-22 – both all-time highs for the Reengagement Project. The D2C stepped up efforts to better serve this population by hiring a half-time Reengagement Supervisor in the fall of 2021 and a new YAN in the spring of 2022. The D2C is committed to meeting the challenge of reengagement which will benefit hundreds of OPS high school students as well as our Omaha community.



# D2 Center Student Snapshot

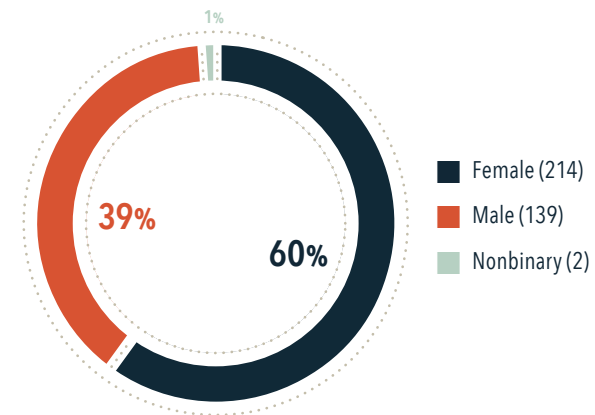
**355**  
**TOTAL**  
**STUDENTS**

## PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO ARE:

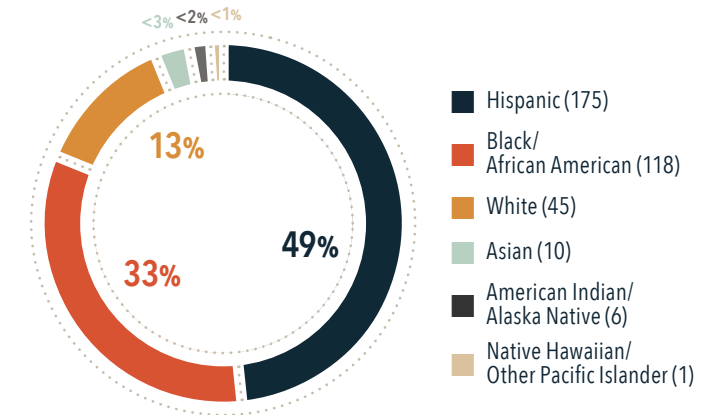


Students may be in multiple categories or none at all.

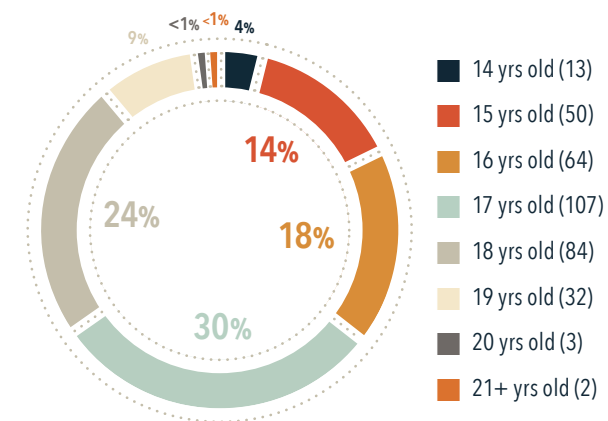
## STUDENT GENDER



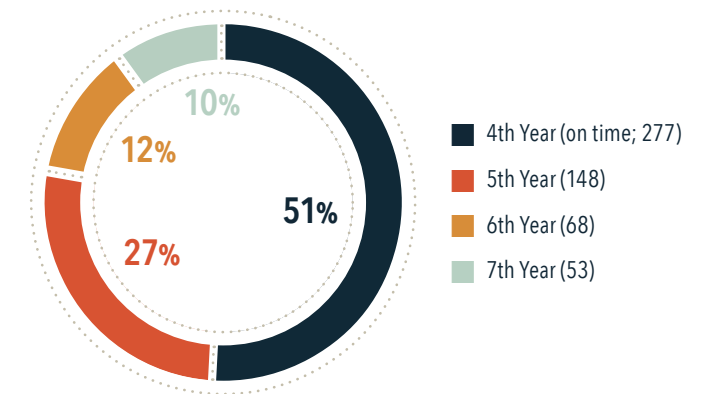
## STUDENT RACE/ETHNICITY



## STUDENT AGE AT INTAKE



## STUDENT YEAR OF GRADUATION





# Nya's Story: A Voice in the Darkness

When Youth Academic Navigator Netta Prince met Nya, Nya was facing major challenges. Her school social worker had referred her to the D2 Center and told Netta that Nya had recently been referred to the county attorney for truancy. Nya was the oldest of the siblings in her home, and she was responsible for helping care for her younger siblings as well as her wheelchair-bound mother, who did not speak English. An Immanuel counselor was visiting her twice a week for family issues, and her father was not in the picture. Nya was looking for a part-time job to help support her family. She had earned only 21 credits in her first two and a half years of high school and was off-track to graduate on time. Nya was a special education student struggling with low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. She experienced teasing on the school bus on the way to school. Not going to school was a way to avoid that... there were many dark days for Nya.

For the next four years, Netta was there for Nya. She referred her to community resources to help with housing, rent, utilities, and food. A D2 Center Career Navigator helped her find jobs. She also referred her to D2 Center teachers for tutoring. Netta took her to job interviews, helped her plan bus routes, and gave her bus passes. Netta and Nya went clothes shopping at Goodwill, and Netta was always a patient listener and a voice of encouragement in difficult times. Nya left her high school after four years still eleven credits short of graduation.

For three years, Nya went back and forth between the Independent Studies and Accelerate programs. At one point, she did not respond to Netta for months and did not attend school for a year. But Netta never gave up and would occasionally reach out to Nya, hoping for a response. Nya finally reached out to Netta and sounded determined to go back to school and finish her last six credits. Netta could sense her growth over the years - she had gradually become more confident, positive, and outgoing and was enjoying her new job at a childcare center.

Nya's journey took seven years, but she finally graduated. She told Netta, "Thank you so much. You were always there to check up on me. I am grateful I was given an amazing YAN. I truly appreciate everything you did for me!"

**Netta could sense her growth over the years - she had gradually become more confident, positive, and outgoing and was enjoying her new job at a childcare center.**

Nya is now working full-time at a childcare center. She reached out to Netta recently seeking help from a Career Navigator to explore the possibility of an early childhood degree at Metropolitan Community College. Netta is still amazed when she thinks about Nya's perseverance, growth as a young woman, and determination to overcome so many obstacles.



# How Students Connect With D2 Center

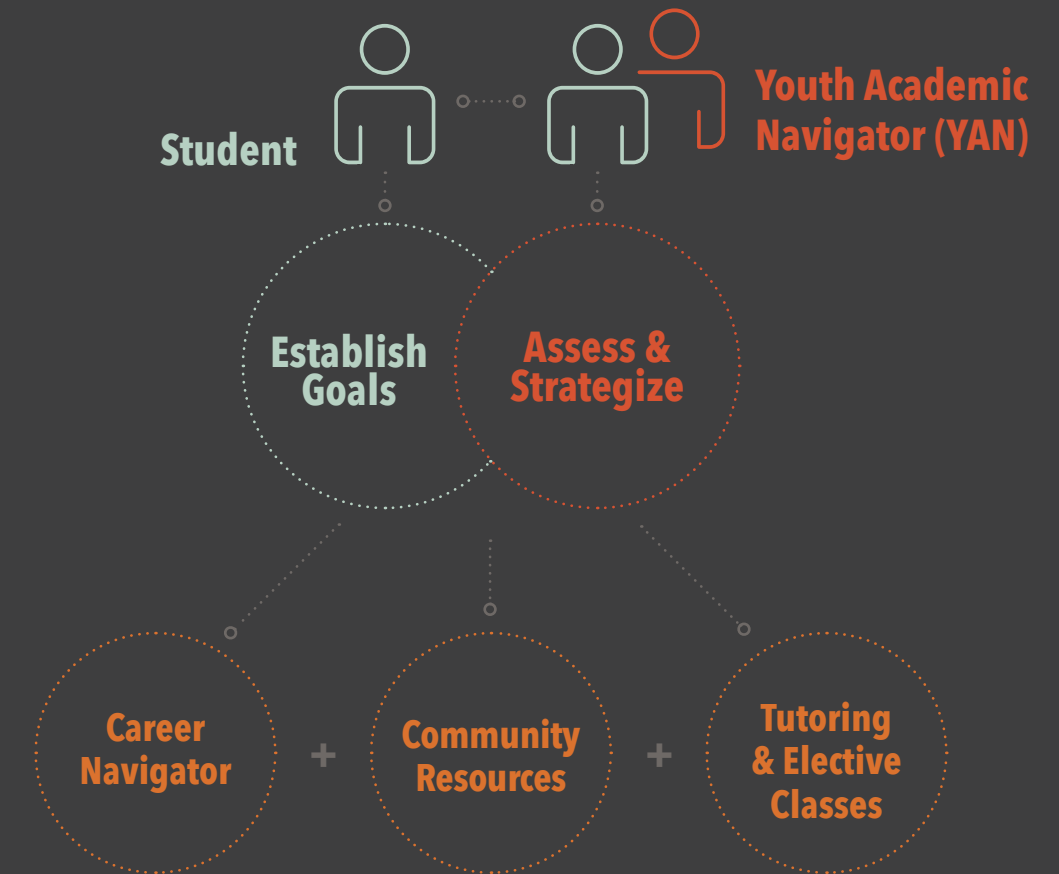
✓ **Omaha Public Schools**  
(and other school districts)

Via Social Workers,  
Guidance Counselors, etc.

✓ **Student/Family**

✓ **Community/Programs**

Via DC Juvenile Services, NECC Teen &  
Young Parent Program, Boys Town, etc.



## IDEAL OUTCOMES



**Reengagement**

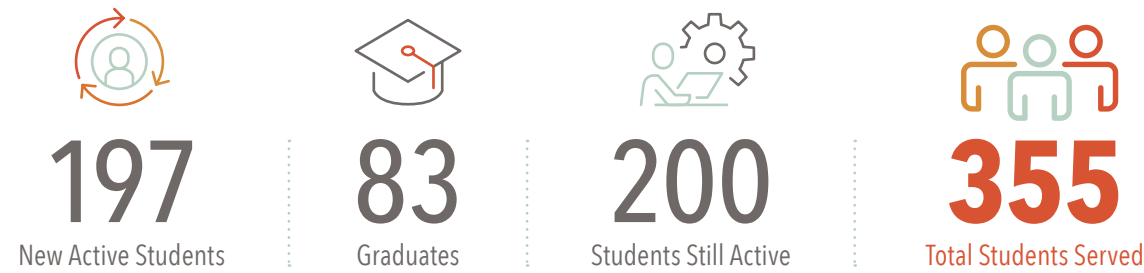


**Graduation**



**Postsecondary/  
Career**

## YOUTH ACADEMIC NAVIGATORS



## CAREER NAVIGATOR

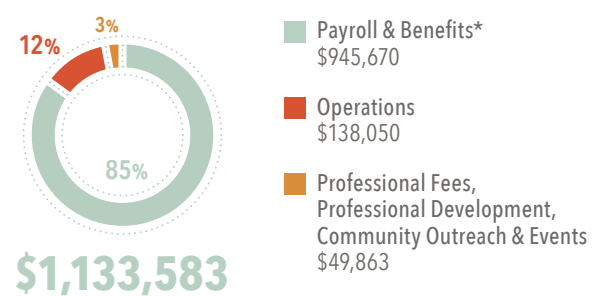
D2 Center  
Students Served **179**

## REENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST

**381 Students Contacted**

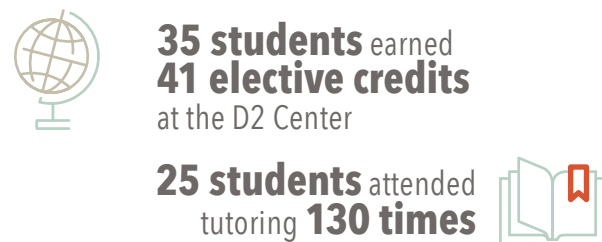


## EXPENDITURES



\*Full-time Staff - 11 Part-time Staff - 6

## ELECTIVE CREDIT CLASSES & TUTORING



# Aryanna's Story: What it Takes

When Youth Academic Navigator Evelia Gutiérrez started working at the D2 Center in October 2018, one of the first students she was assigned was a 15-year-old sophomore named Aryanna. Little did the two of them know the challenges they would face over the next three and a half years. Aryanna spent most of her ninth-grade year living at Uta Halee, and her Promiseship caseworker referred her to the D2 Center knowing she would need extra support after she moved home with her mother and transferred to a large high school. Aryanna managed to earn nine credits at Uta Halee, but her sophomore year did not go well. She was expelled after earning half her credits first semester and then was dropped from the Parrish Expelled Student Program. She did not attend school for months.

One of the main issues Evelia faced was Aryanna's lack of interest in school and motivation to succeed. Another was housing instability, resulting in Evelia sometimes not knowing her whereabouts or having reliable phone numbers to call. Facebook Messenger worked occasionally, but other times Evelia would not get a response for weeks. In August 2019, Aryanna was placed at Blackburn Alternative High School. In those early days Evelia described Aryanna as being "rude, feisty, and disrespectful." A couple times when Evelia made home visits, Aryanna refused to come out of her room.

Evelia wondered what it would take to reach her and was learning she would have to be particularly patient with her. She knew that Aryanna was hurting and that was one reason she acted out. She kept sending Aryanna messages reminding her that she was an amazing person capable of doing anything and that Evelia cared about her and wanted to help her. She visited Aryanna at Blackburn where she was finally attending more regularly and experiencing some academic success. Her progress stopped in her senior year when she disappeared again for a few months during remote learning and the pandemic.

Evelia kept reaching out and encouraging her to go back to school. Finally, she returned to Blackburn in January 2022 and finished her last few credits by March. Evelia was so determined to help Aryanna graduate that when

she started having transportation issues getting to school, Evelia would drive Aryanna herself. Evelia now describes Aryanna as one of the nicest and most respectful students she has had.

Aryanna wrote about her experience with Evelia: "Once I met you, you gave me hope and motivation. You were so patient with me, and you have seen me grow into who I am today. My behavior was so out of control. I lost contact with you multiple times and yet you never gave up on me. I will be forever grateful to have you in my life as one of my support systems. You guided me in the best ways you can. You became a part of my life story and even if I was super grouchy at times and gave you attitude, you never once gave up."

Evelia says, "Even though we had a rough beginning, and it was a challenge working with her, I could always see Aryanna's potential. I felt like the tough wall she put up was also a cry for help, and I had to respond and persevere."



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D2 Center

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Dr. Katie Weitz, Executive Director  
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This program is supported in part by a grant from the United Way of the Midlands.