



## 2025-2026 End-of-Year Report

### We're happy to report:

- ✓ Of the 42 students served during the 25-26 school year, 2% were African American, 72% were Hispanic/Latino, 14% were of mixed ethnicity, and 11% were Caucasian.
- ✓ We continue to serve Denver's underprivileged population, many of whom live below the poverty level. This translates to over 90% of our students qualifying for the free and reduced lunch program.
- ✓ Our school-wide daily attendance rate was around 88%.
- ✓ 8 out of 8 eligible seniors graduated.
- ✓ New students are assessed through a teacher-designed evaluation from a DSS teacher, paired with a one-on-one conversational assessment, to help place each student in the most appropriate classes. This personalized approach has proven more accurate than relying solely on standardized tests or on transcripts from their previous schools.
- ✓ Every student received a faculty advocate designed to connect them within the school, assist in college and career planning, and provide guidance in life skills and goal setting. They meet three to four times a week.
- ✓ The school counselor has met with students to review their credits, explore post-graduation options, and help them develop a graduation plan.
- ✓ Juniors and seniors engaged in various activities, including researching careers, visiting college campuses, applying to colleges, and applying for scholarships and internships
- ✓ Over 80% of the student body participated in staff and partner interactions outside school hours, with about 1500 hours of positive extracurricular activities offered to our students.
- ✓ We hosted a College and Career Day where students engaged positively and became excited about their future.
- ✓ We partnered with a Whole Health Collaborative to teach a special Medical Health class.

### Measurables

- ✓ To start the year with 30 students (70% returning/30% new students to maintain DSS culture). Then grow by 5-10 students until maximum enrollment of 35-40 is reached in the last quarter. **YES, actual was 42**
- ✓ To have a classroom size of no larger than 10 students. **NO, we had to make special exceptions for some classes like Med Health and Bible 1.**
- ✓ To have a student/teacher ratio of 7:1 so every student is known, cared for, and personally educated. **YES**
- ✓ To have 90% of enrolled students return the following quarter. **YES**
- ✓ To maintain or improve an 85% daily attendance rate. **YES**
- ✓ To have an overall Credit Completion Rate of 80%. **YES**
- ✓ To see a 50% improvement in credit completion at a C or above in 1st year after intake. **YES**
- ✓ To see a 1.00 GPA improvement in the 1st year after intake. **YES**
- ✓ To see all eligible seniors earn diplomas. **YES**

- ✓ To see 100% of our graduating seniors have a transition plan to a 4-year, junior, or community college, vocational school, apprenticeship, the military, or gainful employment. **YES**
- ✓ To provide each student with a faculty advocate. **YES**
- ✓ To offer each junior and senior personalized career testing and counseling. **YES**
- ✓ To provide counseling services for students struggling with addictions and other personal issues that affect school and life performance through in-house counselors and community partnerships. **YES**
- ✓ To expose all students to basic economic principles and personal finance training through a variety of required and elective courses prior to graduation. **YES**
- ✓ To involve all students in at least one community service project per quarter (4 quarters total). **YES**
- ✓ Send some of our staff, especially our veteran teachers, to a conference for more extensive professional development. **NO, but it is in the works for our Math teacher who just completed his Masters**

### **Hope Initiative**

- ✓ We continue the Hope Initiative, always ready to receive any student coming out of sex trafficking who is looking to fill their educational gaps and earn their diploma. **YES**
- ✓ Understanding ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and being trauma-informed has become increasingly important in our interview and hiring process, matching even the teaching proficiency level. **YES**
- ✓ With the addition of new staff and teachers, trauma-informed care has become a vital component of our onboarding process. **YES**

### **Lessons Learned**

#### **Attendance and Accountability:**

We continue to learn that attendance is one of the clearest predictors of student success. Many of our students face real barriers outside their control, including transportation challenges, family instability, work demands, and mental health struggles. At the same time, we know that grace without structure does not serve students well. We are learning to communicate expectations earlier, follow up more consistently, and help students understand that showing up matters—not just academically, but personally.

To support this, DSS uses a structured early-intervention attendance process designed to address concerns before course failure occurs. When a student approaches five absences, staff are alerted, and the student is required to meet with school leadership. Together, the student, Principal, and often the student's advocate identify barriers to attendance and create an individualized attendance contract with clear expectations and supports. Teachers and advocates then work collaboratively to monitor progress and provide follow-up as needed.

This process emphasizes accountability, relational support, early intervention, and shared problem-solving while maintaining clear academic expectations.

#### **Staff Unity and Communication:**

We learned again this year that the mission of DSS is too weighty and sacred for any one person to carry alone. Our staff need shared language, shared expectations, and shared rhythms of support. As we grow, we must continue to build a culture in which teachers, advocates, counselors, administrators, and leadership work together on behalf of students rather than operating in separate lanes.

Teachers meet for 30 minutes each morning Monday through Thursday, 30 minutes after school on Wednesdays, and for quarterly Professional Development Fridays from 1:00–4:00. While we are a small

school, the needs of our students run deep. It is not uncommon for one student conversation alone to take over an hour. We are continually working to steward our meeting time well, strengthening collaboration and communication without creating unnecessary burnout.

We also recognize the importance of better systems for documentation and communication. There is a tremendous amount of information our staff carries daily, and we are learning the value of keeping clear written notes and processes that help us stay organized both logistically and missionally.

### **Student Buy-In Matters:**

Rules alone do not change students. Relationship, consistency, and meaningful buy-in do. We saw that when students understand the “why” behind expectations, they are more likely to rise to them. Our goal is not control for control’s sake, but helping students practice self-control, responsibility, and ownership.

One area we’ve identified for growth is helping students better understand the Denver Street School’s unique nature, including the important role donors play in sustaining our mission. At times, students have shared that tours can make them feel like “goldfish in a fish tank.” While some of this is natural for teenagers, we also recognize the need to help students feel like active participants rather than passive observers.

Because DSS is 100% privately funded, donor involvement is essential and deeply appreciated. To bridge this gap, we are developing a “DSS 101” onboarding experience for new students that explains the “why” behind donor engagement and introduces key aspects of school culture. Our goal is to empower students to take ownership of their experience, contribute ideas, and engage more intentionally with donors during tours and events.

### **Trauma Informed Care:**

Throughout the year, our staff continued to grow in trauma-informed care practices and to deepen our understanding of the challenges many of our students carry. Training and discussions focused on topics such as ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences), stress responses like fight, flight, freeze, and fawn, and recognizing emotional triggers not simply as negative behaviors, but often as warning signs of deeper struggle.

We worked to put these principles into practice through daily morning meetings and weekly staff discussions, learning to view students with greater compassion and understanding beyond their outward behavior. We also explored the importance of using the right tools at the right time—comfort, calm, or challenge—depending on the student and situation. For example, a student struggling with social anxiety and avoiding class requires a different approach than a student who is disengaged or refusing work altogether.

This work continues to reinforce that effective trauma-informed care requires empathy, patience, discernment, and consistency from every member of our staff.

### **College and Career Day:**

We had a highly successful College and Career Day featuring partners and professionals from organizations such as CrossPurpose, Master’s Apprentice, and CCU, as well as individuals from a wide range of career fields, including pastors, pilots, and trades professionals. The event used a speed-dating-style format, allowing small groups of students to rotate through conversations and engage more personally with each representative.

The impact was significant. We watched underclassmen begin to imagine new possibilities for their futures, while several graduating seniors took tangible next steps toward career and educational opportunities

inspired by the event. One example is Ari, who received a scholarship and will be participating in Master's Apprentice.

### **More Partnerships:**

This year reinforced the importance of strengthening partnerships that enable DSS to connect students with support beyond what we can sustainably provide as a school. While DSS has the heart to care deeply for students as a ministry, we are also limited in capacity and called to remain focused on our role as an educational institution.

Through our Compassion Fund, we can assist with some immediate student needs, but our resources are limited. DSS can provide relationship, structure, advocacy, and spiritual support, but we are not meant to carry every burden alone. Strong partnerships help connect students and families to specialized care and resources related to housing, substance abuse recovery, mental health support, and long-term stability.

This year especially highlighted the need for stronger referral pathways and collaborative support systems so that, rather than simply reacting to destructive behavior, we can help students pursue healing, accountability, and practical next steps beyond the classroom.

Some valuable community connections this year include:

- CrossPurpose Recovery — Their “LiveDifferent Recovery” program provides an inclusive recovery community with meals, workshops, mentorship, guest speakers, and childcare support. This gives students and families access to recovery-centered relationships and encouragement outside of school hours.
- Fully Liberated Youth — A youth-focused organization helping young people pursue freedom from addiction and destructive cycles while finding healthy support and mentorship.
- Brad's House — A Christ-centered residential recovery program offering structure, discipleship, accountability, and long-term support for individuals seeking freedom from addiction and life-controlling struggles.
- Jefferson Center for Mental Health — An important mental health partner helping connect students and families with counseling, crisis support, therapy services, and additional mental health resources.
- Lakewood PD (H. Mahic) — We re-established contact with a police officer who used to work with a former principal at DSS. He helped us through some serious calls from a student making suicidal threats after experiencing abuse at home, to some potential campus safety risks.

As DSS grows, we want to continue strengthening partnerships with churches, nonprofits, counselors, recovery organizations, alternative education programs, trade programs, and community mentors. We have learned that lasting transformation happens best when students are surrounded by a network of healthy adults working together toward the same goal.

### **The Power of Play:**

One lesson we continue to learn is that many of our students have been forced to grow up too quickly. Trauma, instability, poverty, violence, addiction, and survival-based living often push young people into adult burdens long before they are emotionally ready. As a result, many of our students have missed out on simply being kids.

This year, we became even more intentional about creating opportunities for students to experience joy, play, creativity, and healthy connection without attaching pressure or performance to it. From trips to the Sand Dunes to bowling, batting cages, Topgolf, celebrations, community events, and hands-on activities, we watched students build healthier peer relationships, engage more deeply in school, and soften

emotionally in meaningful ways. For some students, these were experiences they had never had access to before.

What may appear small from the outside often becomes deeply significant for our students. These moments remind them there is more to life than survival. We are learning that play is not the opposite of growth—it is often part of healing. Joy, celebration, and healthy fun help regulate the nervous system, build trust, and open students to deeper transformation academically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

### **Future Plans**

#### **Denver Rescue Mission:**

Denver Rescue Mission is expanding its housing. We've met with them, and they have continued to express interest in sending their high school students our way.

#### **Policy and Culture Review:**

We will conduct ongoing, intensive debriefs to determine which policies are working effectively and which require updates or revisions. The idea is for our policies to continue reflecting what is best for the school, its staff, and its students. It also allows us to identify our blind spots, both in what we do well and what we do poorly.

#### **Teacher Development:**

We are looking to send interested staff to a teaching conference. Our veteran Math teacher (Mr. Connor) will go to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics on Oct 28-31.

#### **More Forms of Credit Recovery:**

We're looking to give students access to more IS, online modules from Freedom Learning, and credit for therapy, work, etc.

#### **Transportation and Student Mobility:**

One ongoing barrier to student success at DSS is transportation. Many of our students live far from campus or come from situations marked by financial hardship, family instability, or unreliable access to vehicles. Even highly motivated students can struggle to maintain consistent attendance when they lack dependable transportation.

To better support students connected through our partnership with Denver Rescue Mission, we hired a Student Support Specialist to provide transportation assistance. However, demand has quickly exceeded capacity, and her vehicle is already full as additional DRM students continue enrolling.

We have also observed that many students are hesitant to use free public transportation or to get their driver's licenses, creating additional challenges. As a result, DSS has relied on rideshares such as Uber and Lyft, while staff members frequently provide transportation themselves—often extending their workdays in order to help students get to school consistently.

#### **Whole Health Collaborative Partnership:**

This year, DSS partnered with Whole Health Collaborative to offer a Medical Health class for our students. Through bloodwork, physicals, and other intake assessments, students gained valuable insights into their overall health and learned practical ways to improve their quality of life under the coaching of nurse practitioners.

In an environment where many factors feel outside of their control, students were encouraged to take ownership of the choices they *can* make—from staying hydrated to making healthier food choices and developing better long-term habits.

We are excited to continue growing this partnership, as Whole Health Collaborative plans to return during the third quarter of next school year to teach the course again. Opportunities like this not only expand students' horizons and expose them to health-related careers, but also equip them with practical life skills that can positively impact their future health, well-being, and even future generations of their families.

**Renweb:**

DSS has used RenWeb as its primary school management system for many years, but we recognize there is still significant opportunity to improve how effectively we use its tools and features. As the school becomes more organized and systems-driven, we want to pursue additional training and professional development opportunities to help staff better understand and maximize the platform's capabilities in support of communication, organization, and student success.