

# Chapter I

## **Student/Community Profile**

## **General Description**

---

Downtown Continuation High School (DHS) is one of two continuation schools in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) charged with serving students whose success has been limited in the district's comprehensive high schools. The school, located in a residential section of the Potrero Hill District, offers a small, personalized environment and a staff dedicated to serving students with a variety of needs, ability levels, academic deficiencies, talents, and aspirations. Furthermore, as a continuation school that is permitted to calculate units toward graduation based upon hours of study, we are able to offer more credits per semester than a comprehensive high school. All of these characteristics enable us to offer a viable alternative to struggling students throughout SFUSD.

A majority of DHS students are referred by Student Support Service Department (SSSD) due to habitual truancy and/or because they lack sufficient credits to graduate on time. Student assignments to DHS also include disciplinary or safety issues that necessitate a transfer. All of the students at DHS have been placed with us because they have been largely unable to fulfill the expectations of their former traditional academic or charter high schools. DHS represents a second chance for students to succeed and, often, their last chance to graduate from high school. It is our job to meet the needs of these severely at-risk students by offering an educational experience that enables them to re-engage with school, find meaning in learning, achieve academic success, and graduate.

DHS utilizes a school-wide project-based model as our primary instructional delivery system. In pairs, DHS teachers are responsible for developing interdisciplinary, thematic, project-based units that are semester-long and self-contained, meaning students participate in one project all day, every day, for a semester at a time. This semester, for example, students were able to choose from projects focusing on such topics as sustainable ecology, math in music, the environment, and physics in social justice. Projects integrate language arts, social studies, science, math, and one elective such as art, music, or graphic design so that students have the opportunity to fulfill necessary graduation requirements.

It is our belief that, in order for our particular student population to succeed, we must challenge each student to grow academically, while at the same time caring for every individual's emotional well-being. We have found that our integrated, project-based curriculum in small closely-knit teams—with an emphasis on real-world connections, hands-on activities, and relevant field experiences—yields increased attendance and facilitates improved academic success.

## **Student Demographics**

---

DHS draws its student population from all over San Francisco, but primarily the southeast sector of the city, including parts of the Potrero Hill neighborhood where we are now located. Specifically, a large percentage of our students live in Bayview Hunters Point, a largely African American neighborhood with the lowest median family income, highest unemployment rate, and greatest concentration of public housing in the city. A significant number of our students also come from the Mission and Excelsior districts, both predominantly working-class Latino neighborhoods. Because DHS serves clientele from a wide area of San Francisco, we are not a community or neighborhood school, and pre-existing rivalries among various groups outside of school—gangs, “sets” or turfs—sometimes make their way onto campus.

DHS has the capacity to serve 275 based on a student-to-teacher ratio of 25:1 for each of our ten general education teachers, and 12:1 for our two special education teachers. Upwards of 90% of our students are low-income students of color and, typically, more than 80% are designated by the state as Educationally Disadvantaged Youth (EDY) based on qualification for free or reduced lunch, residence in public housing facilities, receipt of public assistance, parent education level, or standardized test scores below the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile. As of this writing, district accounting places our EDY number far lower than we believe it to be. An inquiry to the district revealed that the numbers were based only on free and reduced lunch forms submitted rather than an accounting of students

in each EDY category. Many of our students do not turn in their lunch forms because they do not partake in the school lunch program.

The chart below highlights Downtown’s racial and ethnic representation in comparison to the district’s secondary school enrollment. The disproportionately high numbers of African American and Latino students at Downtown High School, as compared with the school district at large, present us with the unique challenge of meeting the needs of the demographic groupings that the SFUSD most struggles to serve. For example, our percentage of African American students is nearly three times that of SFUSD high schools, our percentage of Latinos is almost twice that of SFUSD, and our percentage of Chinese students is less than one-twelfth the district’s. While the district works to implement large-scale initiatives designed to close the achievement gap, our school is entirely shaped—and driven—by the fact that this chasm has yet to be bridged.

<b>Ethnicity/ Other Indices</b>	<b>SFUSD Secondary Schools</b>	<b>Downtown High School</b>
African American	12.3%	33.1%
American Indian	0.5%	1.1%
Chinese	36.7%	2.9%
Filipino	6.2%	6.6%
Japanese	0.9%	0.0%
Korean	0.8%	0.0%
Latino	21.2%	39.0 %
Pacific Islander	Not recorded	5.6%
Other Non-white	10.5%	7.3%
Other White	8.6%	2.6%
Declined to State	2.3%	1.8%
Male/Female	51.7%/48.3%	55.5%/44.5%
ELL	20.0%	22.4%
Special Education	9.8%	14.0%
EDY	56.2%	62.1%*

\* Possible inaccuracy described above

## **Staff Demographics**

---

Downtown High School employs eighteen certificated staff consisting of:

- 1—Principal
- 1 – Assistant Principal
- 1—Academic Counselor
- 12—Classroom Teachers
- 1—Resource Specialist Program Teacher
- 1—School Nurse
- 1—Wellness Coordinator

\*Note: This year, the assistant principal position is new, three classroom teachers and the RSP teacher are new to the district, and the academic counselor was increased from half-time to full-time.

Our twelve classified staff members are comprised of:

- 3—Paraprofessionals
- 2—Secretaries
- 2—Custodians
- 2—Security Guards
- 1– Community Health Outreach Worker
- 1—Cafeteria Manager
- 1—Attendance Liaison/After School Program staff member

\*Note: The attendance liaison and a security guard are new to staff this year.

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Certificated</b>	<b>Classified</b>
African American	1	5
Chinese	1	1
Filipino	1	1
Korean	1	0
Latino	4	0
White	10	4
Samoan	0	1
Total	18	12
Male/Female	47.1%/52.9%	27.3/72.7%

Our after-school program was established in the 2008-2009 school year with a site coordinator and an assistant. This year, we have all new staff with 7 members.

1—Coordinator

1—Assistant Coordinator

5—Staff

\*Note: These are not included in the table above.

In addition, several members of our school community who function as part-time staff are employed by outside agencies such as counselors from Richmond Area Multi-Services (RAMS) and the Bayview Hunter's Point Foundation.

## **Outcome Data**

---

**Attendance Data:** DHS's capacity to re-engage students can be measured by percentage of student attendance. Our minimum expectation is 80% attendance. Credit eligibility is directly correlated with attendance, as well as work completion. If a student were to have 80% attendance but completed 100% of their class work, tests and assignments, then they could only earn 15 out of 17.5 possible quarter credits. (Students are expected to earn an additional 5 credits in outside-of-class hours.) Earning at least 15 credits per quarter is therefore the minimum expectation, because that number is aligned with the 80% attendance expectation. The policy of 80% and 15 credits per quarter is the mantra of DHS's aggressive attendance program.

An average of student attendance data over two semesters shows that the top third, or 34% of students, have 80-100% attendance; the mid-third, or 38% of students, have 40-79% attendance; and the bottom third, or 28% of students, have 0-39% attendance. Our goal is to move half of the students who have 40-79% attendance to at least 80% attendance. In Spring 2009, an attendance liaison funded, by SFUSD, calculated every student's percentage of attendance in two-week blocks, with a cumulative total for each quarter as well as for the semester. When individual student attendance data was posted

in the lobby biweekly, we found that overall student attendance improved significantly. As a result, DHS was recognized by the district in May 2009 for a 25% improvement in attendance, the highest overall growth in SFUSD.

Realizing that simply posting the data seems to have impacted attendance, the administration proposed and implemented a new assets-based strategy to combat truancy, the Prevention and Intervention, or PI ( $\pi$ ), program. All of our support staff is now focused on coordinating incentives and support structures to help students meet attendance and credit expectations.

**Graduation Data:** Examination of DHS graduation data from the last three years indicates that we are graduating approximately 65 students annually, compared with 20-40 annually in the years prior to implementation of our project-based structure. An average of 74.3% of our graduates over the last three years passed the CAHSEE. Special Education students who received waivers are included in the CAHSEE data, as well as students who returned to pass the CAHSEE after receiving their original certificates of completion to take the test. We analyze graduation data in conjunction with CAHSEE because it gives an accurate reflection of the academic outcomes for students who complete the matriculation requirements in SFUSD.

**California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE):** Given its importance to students, the CAHSEE is one standardized assessment that we invest in preparing students to pass. Furthermore, as a school dedicated to confronting educational inequities, we must afford our students the opportunity to earn a high school diploma as opposed to a certificate of achievement. The implications of not passing the CASHEE for students from disenfranchised communities would be grim. We believe that it is our responsibility to create curriculum that facilitates student achievement of CAHSEE standards. For example, the whole school essay initiative is a direct response to low student performance on the written section of the CAHSEE. Our CAHSEE passage rate among graduates has increased steadily over the last three years.

The district has contracted with Data Director this year to provide an online data system that can produce detailed disaggregated reports on a variety of assessments going back at least five years. We are still in the beginning stages of learning to use the system to produce the desired reports. In the interim, we have found that the most useful way for us to track our CAHSEE data, given the transient nature of our school population, is to look at the passage rates of our graduating seniors, shown below.

	<b>Graduates (June &amp; July)</b>	<b>Passed Both</b>	<b>Passed ELA Only</b>	<b>Passed Math Only</b>	<b>Passed None</b>
<b>2008-2009</b>	64	56 87.5%	2 3.1%	4 6.2%	2 3.1%
<b>2007-2008</b>	64	48 76.6%	10 14.9%	2 2.1%	4 6.4%
<b>2006-2007</b>	67	41 61.2%	10 14.9%	9 13.4%	7 10.4%
<b>Total</b>	195	145 74.3%	22 11.3%	15 7.7%	13 6.7%

This data demonstrates that DHS has made marked improvement in the percentage of graduating seniors who pass the CAHSEE examination and are able to earn their diplomas. DHS's improvement in the 2008-2009 school year is notable, especially during a year when the Superintendent of Schools for California produced a press release voicing concern over the declining CAHSEE passage rate of the state's seniors. Similarly, the San Francisco Unified School District experienced declining passage rates in that same period, falling to approximately 87% from 90% in the previous year. DHS's CASHEE pass rate is now on par with the rest of the district, which is particularly significant considering that the population we serve is comprised of students who have been academically unsuccessful in the past. In addition, the vast majority of our graduates are educationally disadvantaged African American and Latino. In California's graduating class of 2009, only 81% of African American students and 87% of Latino students passed the CAHSEE. During the 2008-2009 school year in the SFUSD, only 56.3% of African American students passed the English Language Arts (ELA) CAHSEE, falling to 50.0% for educationally disadvantaged African Americans. For the Math CAHSEE, just 47.6% of African American SFUSD students passed, decreasing to 43.0% of EDY African Americans. Only 69.9% of Latino students passed the ELA CAHSEE,

while 59.4% of EDY Latino students passed. Finally, 62.2% of Latino students passed the Math CAHSEE and 56.9% of educationally disadvantaged Latinos passed.

Not only are the 2009 DHS passage rates as high as the rest of the district but, for our African American and Latino graduates, our rates are far above the district average. This is evidence that we are indeed serving our students in their efforts to pass the CAHSEE. We have improved our CAHSEE scores primarily by embedding academic skills within our project curriculum, through our Literacy Initiative and through increasing project rigor. Improved performance on the CAHSEE encourages us to continue improvements in the direction we have been moving.

**California Standards Test:** While all state and district mandated tests are administered at Downtown High School, our students have traditionally performed very poorly on Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) tests. Review of STAR data from comprehensive high schools shows that students entering DHS range primarily from basic to far below basic. Once at DHS, students historically do not buy into the STAR exam or make little effort on the assessment. We attribute this dynamic to the fact that the test does not affect their ability to earn credit towards graduation, nor does it affect their ability to graduate with a diploma. The fact that our CAHSEE score results are far better than the STAR results is evidence that students invest considerably more effort into the CAHSEE, which has a direct impact on their ability to graduate with a diploma. Lastly, a majority of DHS students have educational gaps due to truancy or learning difficulties. They find the tests disempowering and therefore dismiss the testing process as unnecessary.

Standardized test data is also problematic because, at a continuation school, the length of time students are with us can range from three weeks to three years. As a result, our percentage of matched scores is typically below 10% and it is therefore difficult to use data from STAR testing to demonstrate longitudinal growth. Many of the students who study with us for a full year become seniors by credits (170 or more) and are therefore exempt from STAR testing. We are left with very small numbers of students whose tests are measured; in recent memory, there have been years of as few as four, nine, eleven,

and fourteen matched scores. The state itself recognizes the inherent flaws in evaluating continuation schools through standardized test scores; continuation schools statewide are not measured by the Academic Performance Index or Annual Yearly Progress measures in the same way as comprehensive high schools. In practice, therefore, DHS does not utilize CST data to plan curriculum nor does the data impact the school-wide benchmarks. Last year's STAR report, below, is representative of typical California Standards Testing (CST) results at DHS.

<b>English Language Arts (2008-2009)</b>						
	Scores Reported	Far Below Basic	Below Basic	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
Grade 9	15	47%	40%	7%	7%	0%
Grade 10	62	76%	18%	6%	0%	0%
Grade 11	39	90%	8%	3%	0%	0%
Total	116	77%	17%	5%	1%	0%

<b>Math (2008-2009)</b>						
Student Group	Total Scores Reported	% Far Below Basic	% Below Basic	% Basic	% Proficient	% Advanced
Grade 9	11	36%	64%	0%	0%	0%
Grade 10	46	74%	26%	0%	0%	0%
Grade 11	32	63%	38%	0%	0%	0%
Total	89	65%	35%	0%	0%	0%

**Response to Literature Essay:** DHS uses the Response to Literature essay, the final whole-class book assessment in the Literacy Initiative, as the primary school-wide assessment to drive literacy instruction. The Leadership Team, based upon recommendation from the Literacy Committee, implemented this assessment as a measure of student academic growth. Our goal was to create an authentic assessment that could give us matched scores. It is difficult to use STAR data to demonstrate longitudinal growth since the percentage of matched scores is typically below 10%.

Fall 2008 was the first semester in which DHS started collecting essay data for analysis. In this benchmark semester, 70 out of 203 students had essays scored using our school-wide rubric. In Spring 2009, 70 out of 237 students had essays scored. At this point, not all teachers provided essay data. In Fall 2009, 112 essays were scored out of 239 students. All teachers submitted essay data.

There were a number of matched scores between Fall 2008 and Spring 2009. At that time, analysis of the scores did not have any statistical significance due to some teachers' inconsistent instruction and achievement expectations. As discussed in the Progress Report, DHS has struggled in the past with aligning the school's vision with that of some of the individual members of the faculty. Unfortunately, these differences in pedagogy have prevented DHS from producing reliable data in relation to our most authentic and relevant assessment tool. However, beginning with the 2009-2010 school year, DHS is moving forward with a faculty full of new hires that is working together to produce essay data to inform and improve instruction. Just recently, a professional development workshop was held to anchor the scoring of the essays using the school-wide rubric and ensure that data will be valid and reliable for the end of the year. We are looking forward to examining data from this school year.

***Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM):*** Downtown High School participates in the Alternative Schools Assessment Method (ASAM) that was instituted by the California Department of Education. ASAM allows continuation schools to choose three indicators of the school's progress. Our indicators are as follows:

1. Student persistence (defined by the ASAM as "the percent of long-term students who received either classroom-based instruction or instruction through independent study strategy and who did not drop out during the reporting year")
2. Suspension rate ("the number of out-of-school suspensions as a percent of long-term student enrollment")
3. Attendance ("days of attendance by all long-term students as a percent of days enrolled")

	<b>Student Persistence</b>	<b>Attendance</b>	<b>Suspensions</b>
2007-2008	78%	76%	25.4%
2008-2009	88%	82%	21%

During the 2007-2008 school year, both our principal and head counselor/dean were new to the school. In order to establish high behavioral expectations under their leadership, many students were suspended for behaviors that were previously not given priority. The number of suspensions decreased after the authority of the new administration was firmly in place.

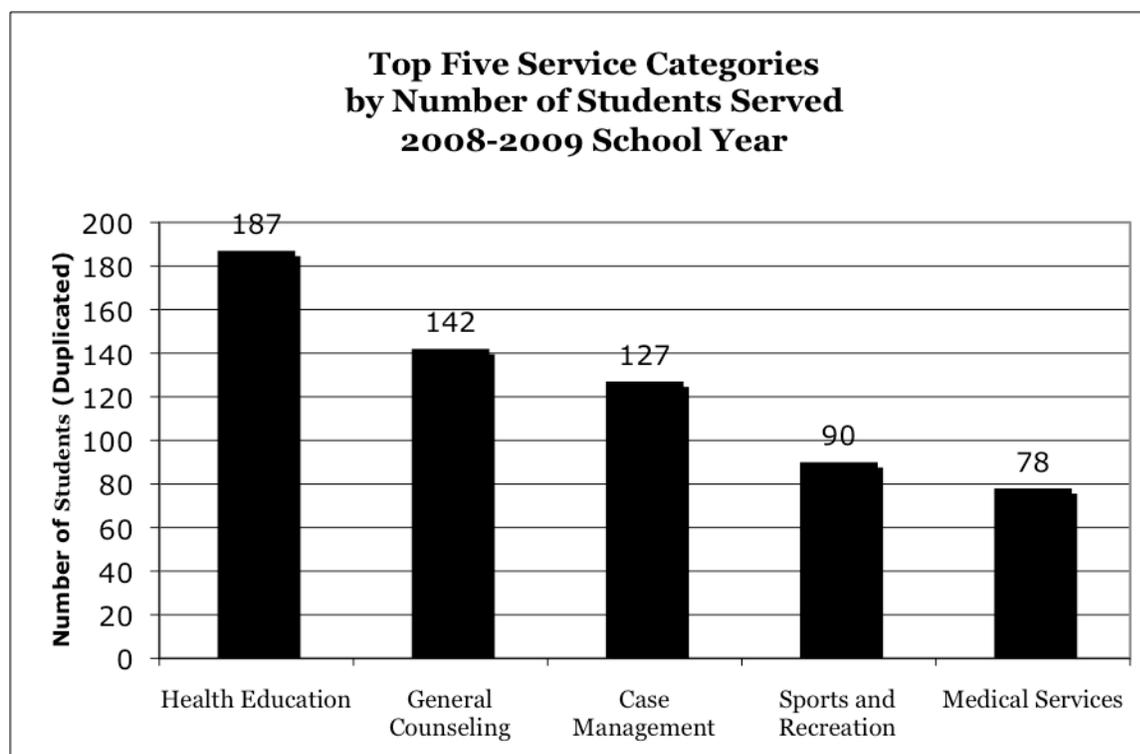
ASAM data is not disaggregated; however, we track suspension and expulsion rates by ethnicity. While African Americans and Latinos represent our highest numbers of suspensions, they also are our two largest ethnic groups. African American students continue to outpace all other subgroups on suspensions. To reduce these numbers, DHS is continuing to direct a significant amount of resources into such efforts as anger management groups, substance abuse counseling, and building and strengthening personal relationships with parents and guardians. This approach is designed to provide support based on student need and leverage all available resources to assist our students in developing positive behaviors.

<b>Suspensions</b>			
	<b>2007-2008</b>	<b>2008-2009</b>	<b>2009-20010</b>
African American	42	12	5
Latino	2	3	4
Other	14	2	5
Total	58	17	14
<b>Expulsions</b>			
	<b>2007-2008</b>	<b>2008-2009</b>	<b>2009-20010</b>
African American	1	0	0
Latino	0	0	0
Other	0	1	1
Total	1	1	1

**Post Secondary Education Data:** SFUSD uses data from the Student Clearing House that tracks students after graduation. The reports are based on attendance and completion data provided by more than 3,300 colleges that participate. DHS has six years of post-secondary education data on 427 graduates from 2002-2008. Student Clearing House data shows that 47% of the students that graduated from DHS during these years enrolled in college after graduation: 93% in a two year public, 4% in a two year private, 2% in a four year public, and 1% in a four year private. Our assumption is that more than half of DHS graduates enter directly into the workforce without post secondary education. The data shows that 18% of students across all graduation years are still enrolled in college as of May, 2009: 87% in a two year public, 11% in a two year private, 2% in a four year private. We cannot conclude completion rates nor drop out rates. It is encouraging to see that from the class of 2007-2008, of the DHS graduates who enrolled in college, 75% are still attending.

<b>DHS Report on College Enrollment</b>						
Graduation Year	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
# of Graduates	83	89	90	62	54	49
Enrolled in post secondary after graduation	34	46	41	35	28	17
Two Year Public	31	44	39	32	26	16
Two Year Private	3	1	2	1	1	1
Four Year Public	3	1	2	1	1	1
Four Year Private	0	0	0	2	1	0
Enrolled in post secondary as of 5/29/09	5	16	14	10	17	13
Two Year Public	5	14	12	8	14	12
Two Year Private		2	1	2	2	1
Four Year Public	0	0	0	0	0	0
Four Year Private			1	0	1	0

**Wellness Services:** The Wellness Center provides students with a multitude of health-related services. The chart below details the number of students who accessed Wellness services last year.



## **Expected School-wide Learning Results**

---

The Expected School-wide Learning Results (ESLRs) at Downtown High School have remained constant since our last full self-study because we feel that they are honest representations of our priorities as a school. Downtown High School students will think critically, communicate effectively, contribute socially, and work collaboratively. We have further refined our ESLRs by adding Critical Academic Skills as tangible products to assess mastery of each learning goal, as detailed below.

### **1. Communicate Effectively**

- a. Compose two pieces of writing (creative and expository) that follow all steps of Downtown High School's adopted writing process.
- b. Produce a five-paragraph, thesis-driven essay every semester.
- c. Prepare and deliver formal and informal oral presentations to peers and community members.

### **2. Work Collaboratively**

- a. Participate in teacher-designed collaborative learning experiences such as partner work and working in groups of three or more, with designated roles.

- b. Engage in team building activities that promote mutual respect.
- c. Complete ongoing group projects with individual roles and responsibilities.

**3. Contribute Socially**

- a. Participate in community-oriented experiences, in class or in the field, that involve people or organizations from outside the school.
- b. Complete assignments that require examining and analyzing social justice issues.
- c. Participate in classroom opportunities for consensus building and group problem solving.

**4. Think Critically**

- a. Complete assignments requiring textual analysis, including research projects that call for the evaluation of multiple sources, paraphrasing, and a bibliography.
- b. Receive direct group instruction in mathematics that is aligned with available SFUSD programs, and solve problems that require the application of math concepts to real world situations and/or other subject areas.
- c. Engage in the scientific process.

These Critical Academic Skills not only provide a means of demonstrating attainment of the ESLRs, they also work support our commitment to increasing academic expectations across projects.