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Thank you to the coalition of the willing.
You see the urgent need for innovation.

A Letter from our President



This has been a tremendous year for Surpassing Distinction. Since our 2023 Declining Enrollment, Project Management and Engagement Consulting work ended with Denver Public Schools, we have worked hard to conceptualize what a statewide system supporting our public schools and communities would look like.

After working in PK-12 public education, higher education, and at nonprofit, collective-impact organizations for over 20 years, I have seen the effects population shifts and declining school enrollment have on communities. By collaborating with numerous experts across the state, we have developed an innovative, community-led concept to ***Revitalize Colorado Family Communities***.

Our vision is to create a collaboratively developed, statewide system that meets the unique and comprehensive challenges our neighbors and schools face from declining enrollment caused by population shifts. The concept applies an evidence-based, community-impact model that lifts community voice, incentivizes school district participation (as partners), and funnels resources into affected communities to mitigate the negative impacts of the population shifts, which can result in school closures and accelerate community decline.

At its essence, our concept to ***Revitalize Colorado Family Communities*** is an economic stimulus process where population shifts and declining enrollment are factors in community identification. Thank you for your interest in this urgent and important issue. With your support, we can effect change across Colorado. But first, we need a chance to prove our model. Please help us in finding at least one school community to implement a Proof of Concept.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daniel Archuleta', written in a cursive style.

Daniel Archuleta, President
Surpassing Distinction

Designed collaboratively.
Executed collectively.

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Organization Background

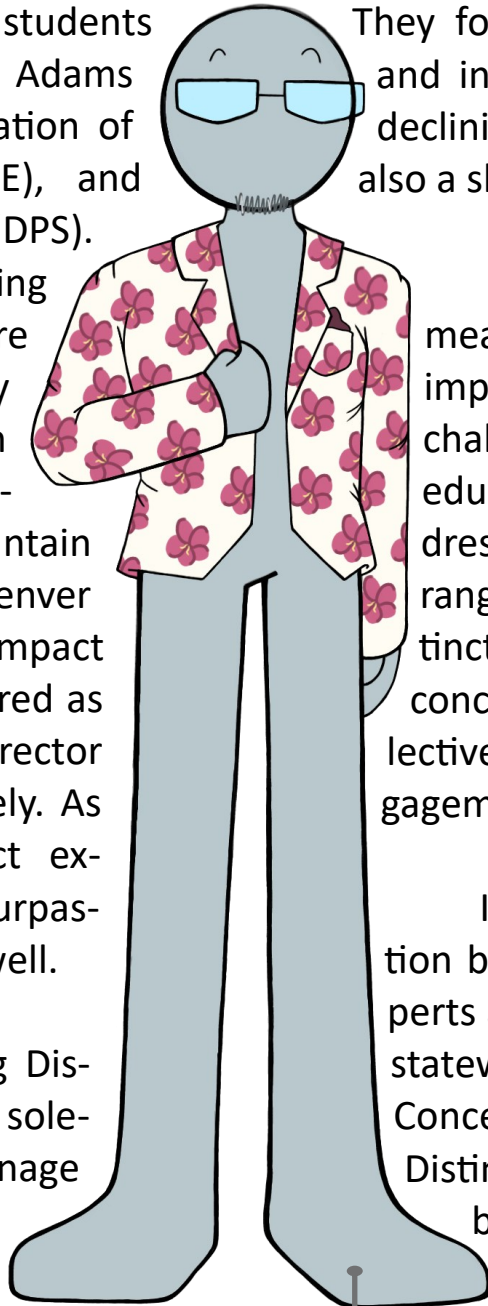
In 2017, Surpassing Distinction was founded by Daniel Archuleta as a limited liability company to promote his independent work serving Colorado students through contracts with Adams 14, the Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE), and Denver Public Schools (DPS). His work grew into serving Colorado youth more broadly and holistically through contracts with two collective impact organizations, Rocky Mountain Partnership (RMP) and Denver Metro Community Impact (DMCI), where he was hired as the Data Director and Director of Operations, respectively. As his network and impact expanded, his vision for Surpassing Distinction grew as well.

In 2023, Surpassing Distinction was awarded a sole-source contract to manage DPS' concerning low and declining enrollment project. Midway into the project, the scope was increased to include engagement, data analysis, and reporting. Surpassing

Distinction contracted a data analyst and began consulting with experts to explore the large-scale context in order to better understand the problem. They found that, across the state and in general, where there was declining enrollment there was also a shift in populations.

Shifts in populations meant that the communities impacted were dealing with challenges much broader than education-related issues. To address the unique and wide-ranging factors, Surpassing Distinction developed a statewide concept and model built on collective impact, community engagement, and social impact.

In 2024, Surpassing Distinction began collaborating with experts across the state to scale the statewide model into a Proof of Concept. Currently, Surpassing Distinction is working in a number of cities to gauge community interest in the Proof of Concept.



These stick figure representations of Daniel were created by his daughter.

Empathic Strategy and Project Management

Surpassing Distinction specializes in partnering with Colorado-based organizations in the education, public, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors.

Mission

To make a lasting, positive impact in addressing complex systems of oppression by partnering with organizations who are committed to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Vision

To be a globally-recognized organization known to bring lasting, positive change in communities by cultivating empathic relationships between education, public, nonprofit, and for-profit partners.

Surpassing Distinction is uniquely positioned to partner with various organizations because of our specialized skills in data, research, pk-12 public education, nonprofit management, collective impact, project management, strategic management, engagement through dialectical models, and our vast network of subject-matter experts across multiple sectors and knowledge domains.

Who Are WE?

Surpassing Distinction contracts with highly skilled and experienced professionals who are intentionally paired with organizations, based on the project requirements, to deliver the highest quality solutions. For this project, Surpassing Distinction has partnered with experts in declining enrollment, community impact, civic engagement, and philanthropy.



Mackenzie Khan, Ed.D.

Mackenzie is a results-driven executive consultant with over 15 years of experience in the K-12 education sector. She has a proven track record of driving transformative initiatives and is adept at providing strategic guidance to educational institutions, leveraging a deep understanding of industry trends and best practices. She is a passionate advocate for innovative and equitable decision-making, dedicated to shaping the future of K-12 options for families through visionary leadership and strategic consulting.



James Roy II, M.U.R.P.

James is an accomplished community-driven professional with experience in entrepreneurship, project management, urban planning, and real estate development. Currently, James serves as the Executive Director at Denver Metro Community Impact where he has revolutionized collective action to be led and constructed by the community. James is also the Founder of Urbanity Advisors, Urbanity Gallery, & Urbanity Live.



Erika Martinez, M.B.A.

Erika is an established communications and marketing leader with over 15 years of experience developing and executing multifaceted external and internal MarCom plans for the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Currently, Erika serves as the Director of Communications and Engagement at Denver Public Library and as a Trustee on the Board for The Denver Foundation.

A Dream Team

Dr. Khan, Mr. Roy, and Mrs. Martinez will be essential in working collaboratively with interested communities, school districts, and public agencies to develop an initial plan (Phase I: Initial Plan Development). Additionally, we are partnering with Sector Law for complementary expertise in advocacy, philanthropy, and counsel.



Alan H. Frosh, J.D., M.B.A.

Alan is the Co-Founder and Managing Director of SECTOR. As a sixth-generation Denver native, Alan has spent his entire career serving his community, as a philanthropic advisor, civic investor, small-business executive, and active volunteer. Alan is the President of Frosh Philanthropy Partners where he has provided consulting services for nonprofit organizations and small businesses since 2006. He is also Co-Owner of the Tattered Cover Bookstore and was the Chief Community Officer.



Erik J. Estrada, J.D., M.P.A., LL.M.

Erik is the Co-Founder and Managing Partner of SECTOR. Erik has an extensive background in the professional, academic, and legal fields. He is uniquely qualified to handle complex, sensitive, and time-critical matters that require strategic thinking, judgment, and credible advocacy. Erik has also served as an Inaugural Fellow in the Colorado Governor's Fellowship Program, a Trustee on the El Pomar Foundation Board, an Adjunct Professor at the University of Denver and University of Colorado, and is an Amazon Bestselling Author.

Consider the Problem: Population Trends

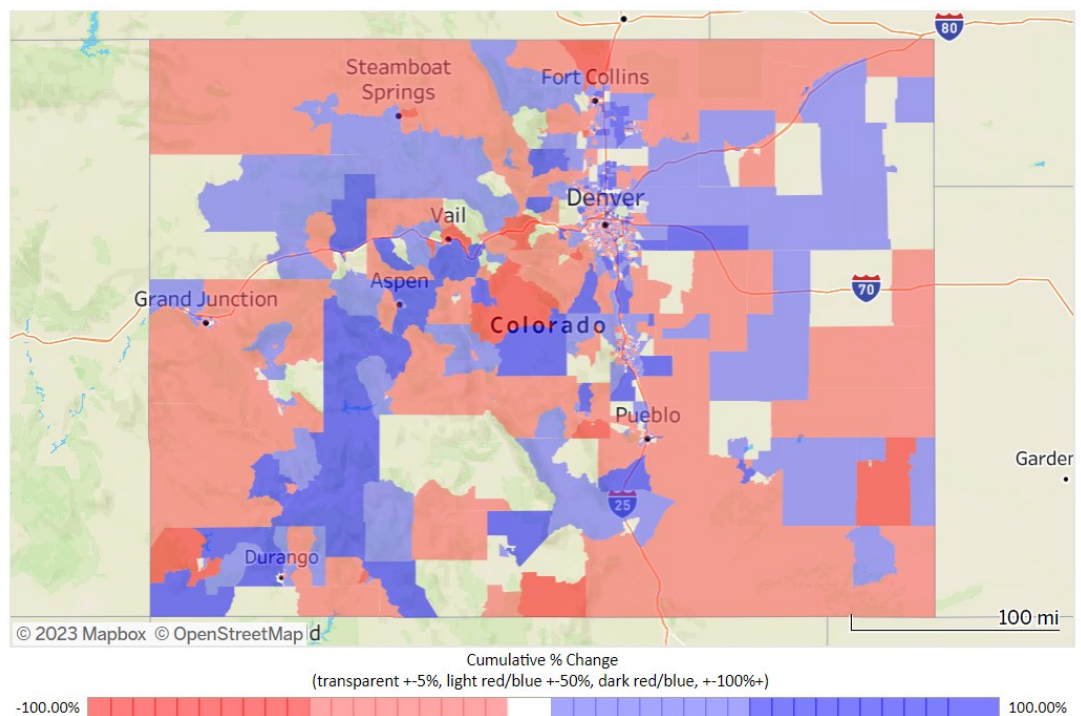
While contracted by DPS as the project manager and engagement consultant of the 2023 Concerningly-Low Declining Enrollment initiative, we explored a wealth of district and census data. We found that in the majority of cases where declining enrollment resulted in small-school subsidies, those schools were also located in areas where there had been decreases and shifts in the population.

In some cases, the decreases could be traced back to annual shifts since the 2010 census. The accumulation of these population decreases

and demographic shifts resulted in valid concerns over how declines in enrollment negatively impact school operations (the ability to provide high quality academic experiences and wrap-around services to students) and financial sustainability.

After the conclusion of the contract with DPS in October 2023, Surpassing Distinction was compelled by its mission to continue the work. We expanded our geographic scope to include the entire state and found similar population trends across urban, suburban, and rural areas.

Data-informed decision-making is one of our operational tenets. To illustrate how declining enrollment is a statewide issue, we created a public, interactive dashboard overlaying school district boundaries across census tracts. Visit SurpassingDistinction.com to link to the map.



Consider the Problem: Population Projections

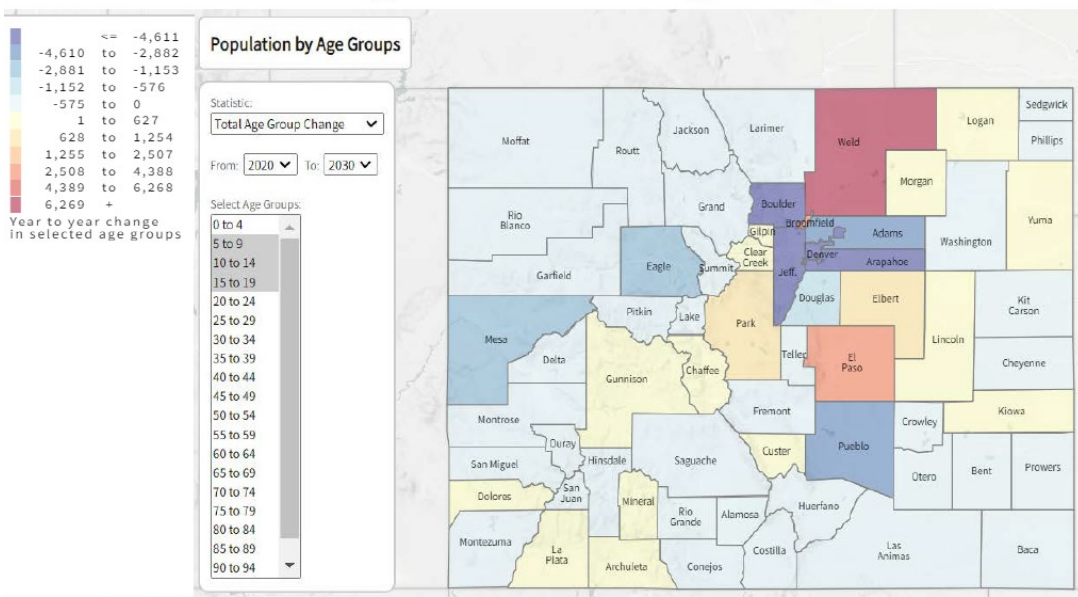
Our findings were supported by state research. The State Demographer, Elizabeth Garner, presented statewide population data and projections to the State Board of Education on January 10, 2024. The presentation emphasized that even if population levels return to where they were pre-COVID over the next few years, the fallout will continue through 2030 and beyond.

In the image below, the projected change in school-age populations (5-19 year-olds) between 2020-2030 shows a continuation of decreases in areas across the state.

It is important to highlight that even slight declines in student counts in rural areas disproportionately impact those communities and schools when compared to similar declines in suburban and urban areas. Furthermore, district resources and capacities in rural areas are often more limited than in more densely populated school districts.

At the time of writing this, and verified by multiple experts, no one else is exploring a statewide system to support districts and communities experiencing these shifts.

Change in School Age Population



This image was taken from the slide show presentation by the State Demographer to the State Board of Education on January 10, 2024. It shows a projection of decreases (blue shades) in school-age populations (5-19 year-olds) between 2020-2030.



COLORADO
Department of Local Affairs

<https://gis.dola.colorado.gov/AgeMap/>

Root Causes Outside of a District's Control

After extensive research on the root causes of population shifts across the country, it can be considered common knowledge that the specific causes are unique by location. In some cases, causes have been identified as: Racism, Classism, Economic Declines, Declining Birth Rates, Gentrification, Decreased Affordable Housing and Affordable Housing Programs, Shifts in Residential Composition and Demographics, Declining Stages of the Community Lifecycle, etc.

Regardless of the exact cause in each location, one thing remains con-

stant across all of the impacted areas. The root causes are complex and systemic issues that are outside of a school district's control.

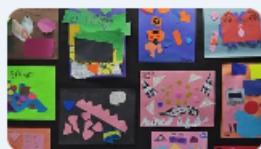
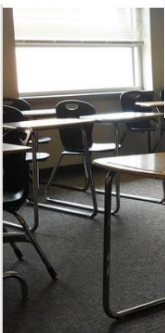
While supporting the Unified Improvement Planning (UIP) processes in two school districts and as a State Review Site Panelist contracted by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to review UIPs, Daniel Archuleta, learned that neither schools nor districts could identify root causes outside of their control. Yet, across Colorado, school districts are often left to manage them with little to no support.

What happens when a school district manages an issue outside of their control with little to no support over a prolonged period?
It becomes **unsustainable**.



'We have heard you': PSD school board halts plans to close, consolidate schools

coloradoan.com



The Denver school board is once again debating a school closure policy

chalkbeat.org

Jeffco is spending \$45 million at schools that have welcomed students from closed buildings

chalkbeat.org • 3 min read

A Local, State, and National Issue

This is a local issue:

School Board Chair, Rob Petterson of PSD, summarized, the projected annual budget shortfalls associated with declining enrollment are estimated at \$35 to \$40 million.

Poudre School District pauses school consolidation plan, seeks community input

coloradoan.com • 7 min read



Colorado public school enrollment falls to state's lowest mark in a decade

9news.com

This is a state issue:

“For the 2023-24 school year, the largest combined enrollment decreases occurred in pre-kindergarten through first grade.”

Exclusive: Chancellor David Banks talks school mergers, migrants, curriculum mandates

ny.chalkbeat.org • 9 min read

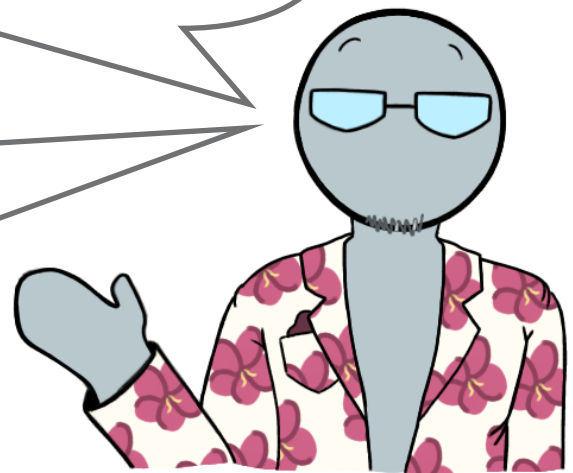
This is a national issue:

“There are a growing number of significantly under-enrolled schools — some of which Banks said will likely need to be consolidated.”

What this Concept IS and is NOT

As a reminder, this concept to *Revitalize Colorado Family Communities* is an economic stimulus process where population shifts and declining enrollment are factors in community identification. This concept is NOT solely about school closures.

Through the implementation of this concept in communities impacted by population shifts resulting in declining enrollment, the issue of school closures will be resolved as a matter of course.



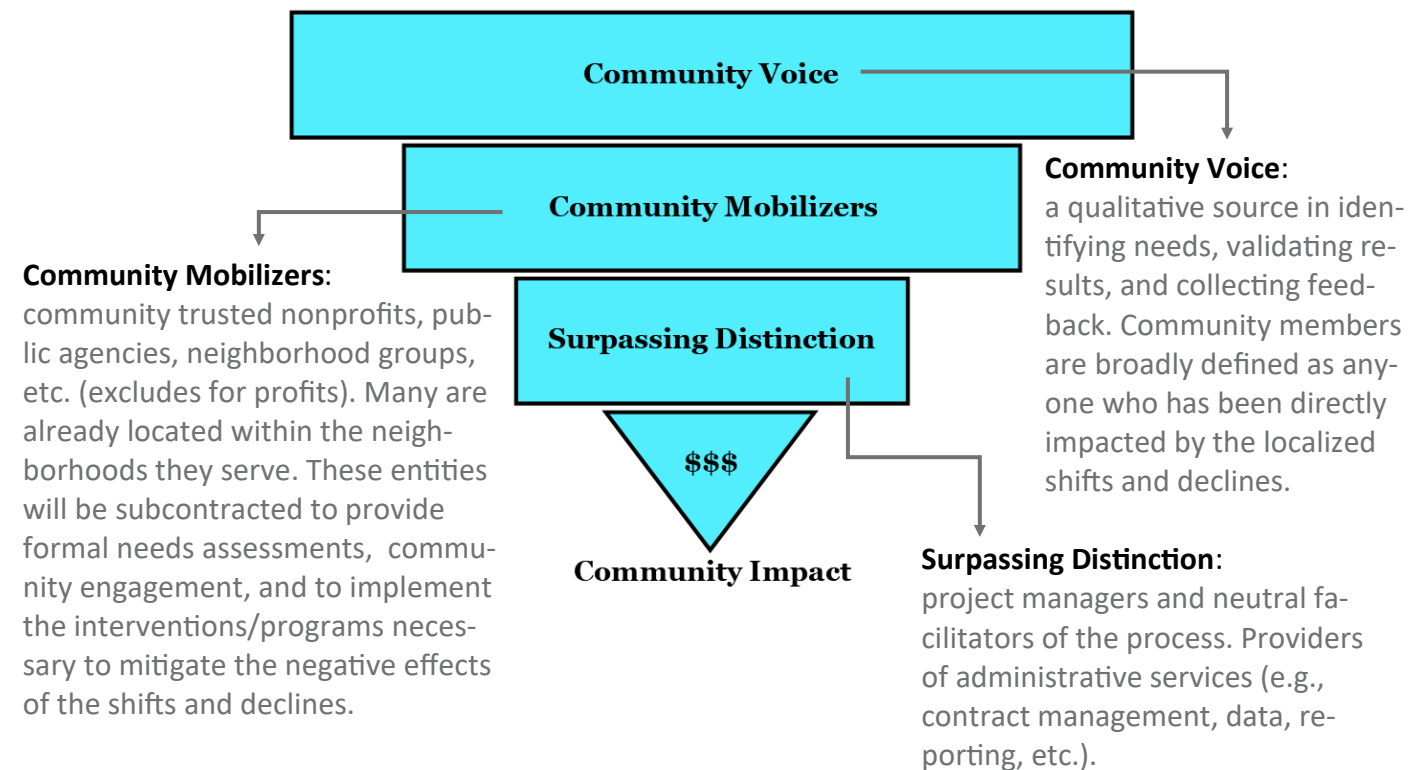
This concept is NOT:

- Focused solely on school closures.
- A way to privatize or reform education.
- A way to strip control away from districts.
- A way to keep EVERY public school open.

This concept IS:

- A process that funnels resources into ALL types of communities that are experiencing the negative effects of Colorado Population Shifts.
- A community-led process to create and sustain positive, community impact using partnerships across ALL types of sectors in order to maximize resources and benefits.
- A way to holistically support communities: including the engagement of communities toward agreements with school districts regarding small-school sustainability.

A Model to Maximize Community Benefits

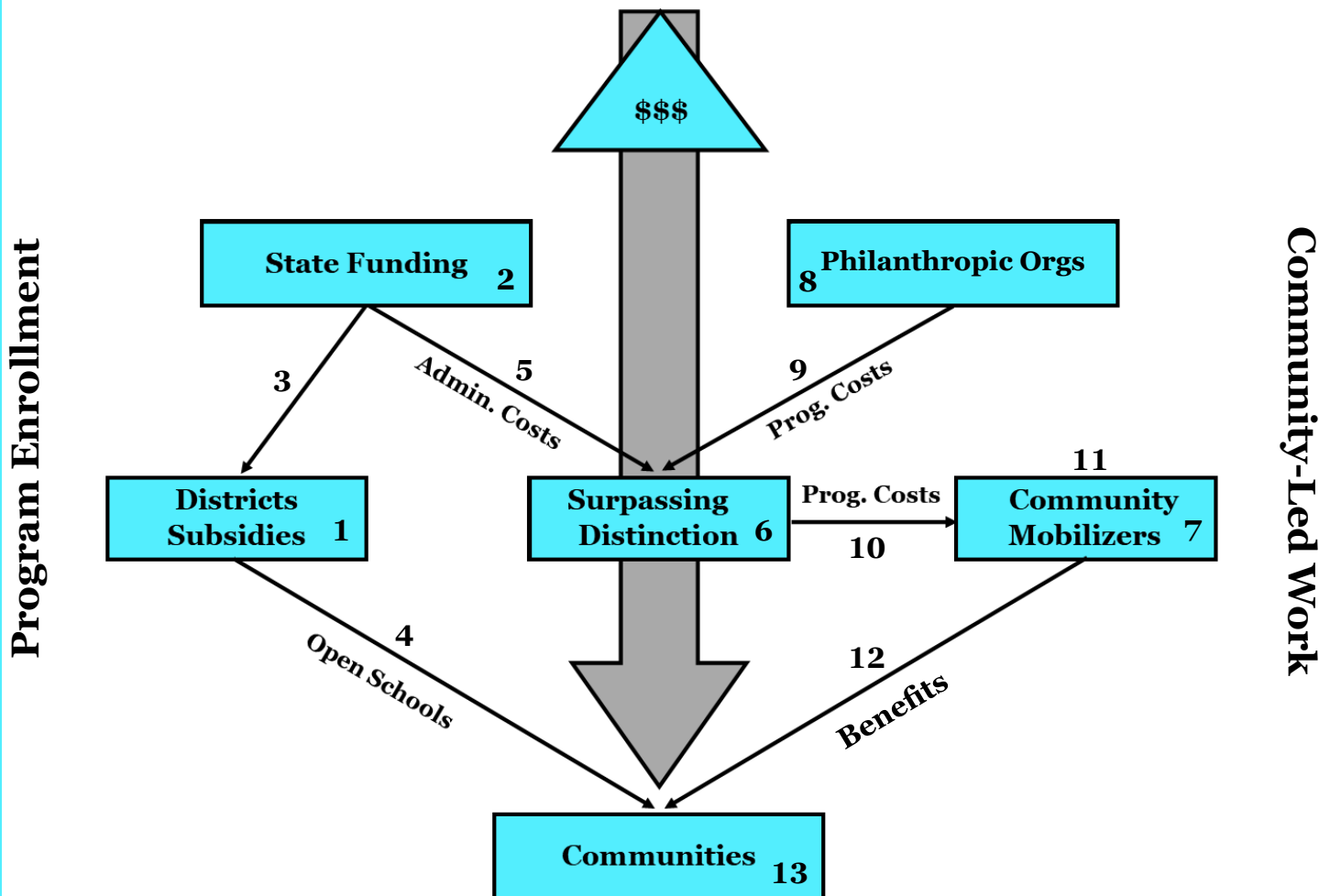


Community impact is the outcome of our model. It is achieved by lifting community voice to the top so that it becomes a call to action. Community voice is authentically engaged through pre-existing relationships between community members and community mobilizers. Surpassing Distinction is the scaffolding that supports the work of the community mobilizers while acting as a passthrough for resources that are funneled into communities, thus maximizing benefits while utilizing a dialectical model at a community-impact scale to effect systems change.

By leveraging this model, resources are funneled into the communities that have been most severely impacted by systemic root causes. These resources provide an immediate relief and act as an incentive for engagement.

Using the Surpassing Distinction model ensures that the most vulnerable voices are lifted to the top to clearly vocalize a call to action. If heeded, action can effect lasting, positive change within communities, and if done right, the work of Surpassing Distinction is mostly invisible.

A Statewide Model (in concept) pt. 1



The model begins with school districts reacting to declining enrollment as a result of population shifts within the communities they serve. The model ends after two-years (est.) of community-led work in revitalization. It is broken by two subprocesses: Program Enrollment and Community-Led Work

Program Enrollment

1. A public school district, anywhere in the state, notices a trend in declin-

ing enrollment in at least one of its schools. The trend is predicted to continue and has resulted in an annual small-school subsidy that is unsustainable. The district verifies that the declines in enrollment are a result of population shifts and they choose to apply for a state grant that will offset the small-school subsidies for two years.

2. The state agency managing the grant (e.g., CDE) awards it to the

A Statewide Model (in concept) pt. 2

school district to offset its small-school subsidies for two years. The grant requires the district to participate in community-led work regarding small-school sustainability. The funds are allocated on an annual basis directly to the school district (3). The funds enable the school to remain open (4) while maximizing community benefit (13).

5. The state agency managing the grant allocates funds to Surpassing Distinction to cover operating costs. Surpassing Distinction acts as the program administrator and is held accountable by the state, local school boards, superintendents, and communities.

Community-Led Work

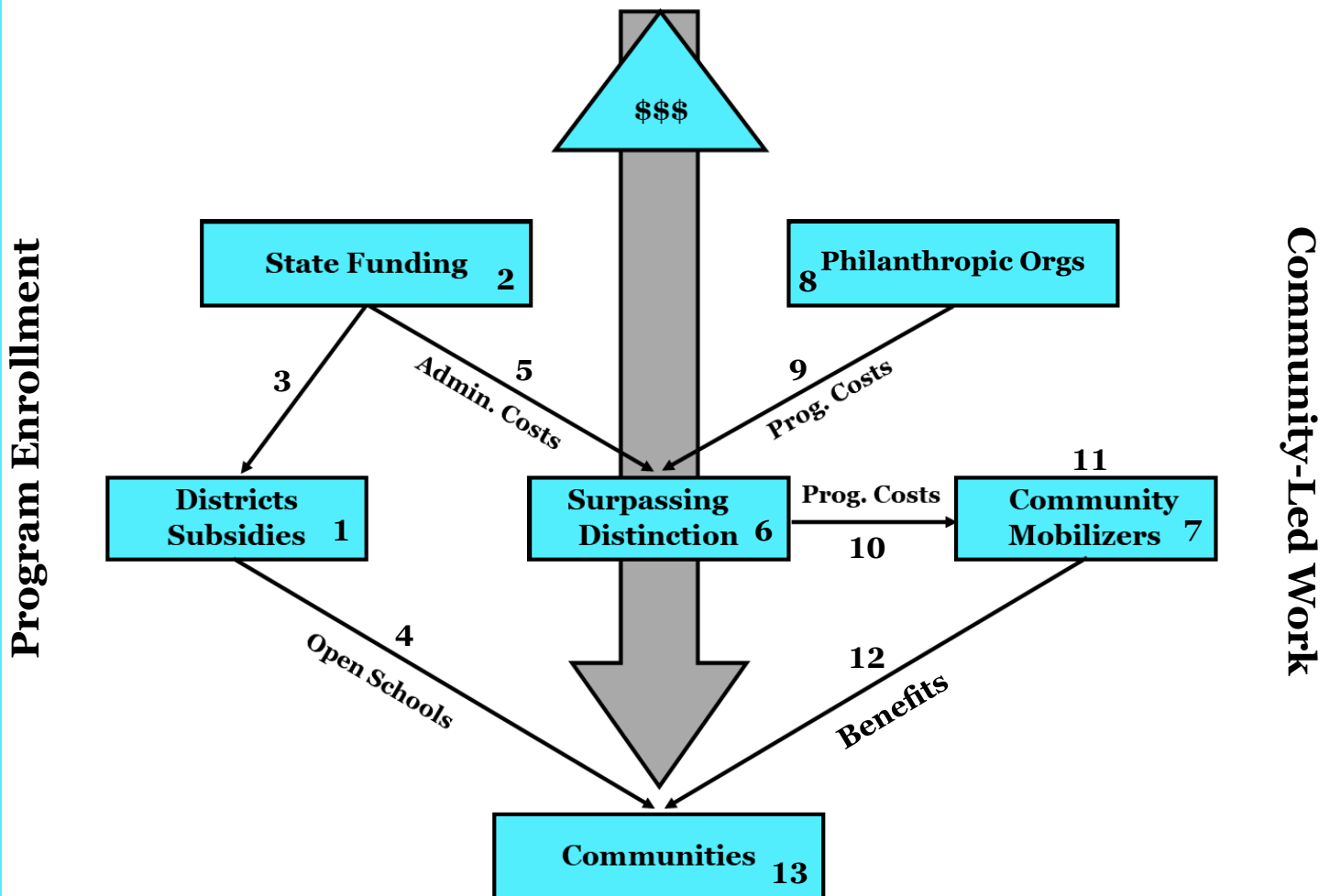
6. Surpassing Distinction conducts pre-work to understand the community and convenes a representative body (e.g., district rep, public agencies reps, nonprofits reps, resident reps, business reps, parent/student reps, school reps, etc.). Surpassing Distinction contracts with Community Mobilizers (7) to engage the community in a qualitative needs assessment through kick-off events (*What*

are the challenges your community faces?) and contracts/collects formal needs assessment reports. The needs are triangulated and prioritized by the representative body and validated by community members through the community mobilizers.

Under the direction of the representative body, Surpassing Distinction releases RFPs to Community Mobilizers, seeking programs/interventions that will be implemented over a 15-month (est.) period. The proposals are evaluated and prioritized by the representative body. Surpassing Distinction convenes philanthropic organizations (8) to fund revitalization packages.

Concurrently, Surpassing Distinction is neutrally facilitating small-school sustainability negotiations between the school district, the representative body, and the community at-large utilizing proven methods of engagement (e.g., dialectical models, short-term agreements, etc.). This work, funded by the state, reduces the explicit and implicit costs incurred by school districts that

A Statewide Model (in concept) pt. 3



outsource their project management and engagement needs (this is what is meant when we say that the issue of school closures will be resolved as a matter of course).

9. Philanthropic organizations fund what they can through Surpassing Distinction's Trust (100% passthrough).

10. Surpassing Distinction contracts with the Community Mobilizers for the proposals that were funded

(11). Surpassing Distinction manages the contracts and provides data, reporting, and continuous improvement support to the Community Mobilizers.

Surpassing Distinction ensures continuous, two-way communication between all of the community groups during the implementation. At the end of implementation, Surpassing Distinction evaluates the impact and performance of the process and publishes the results.

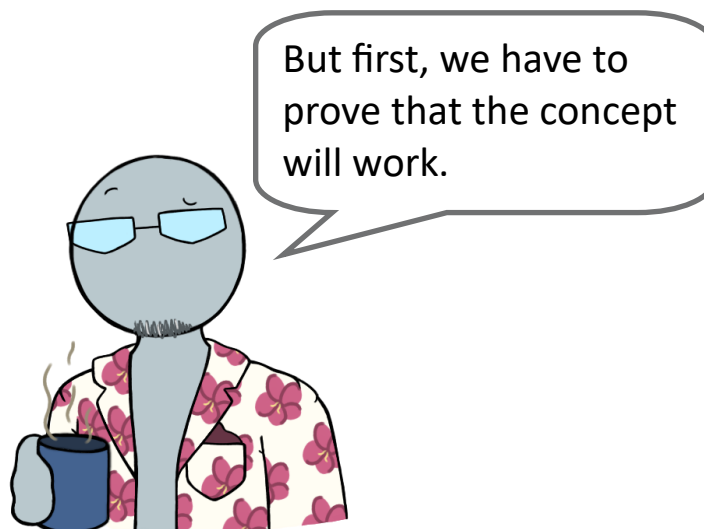
Highlights

12. The programs/interventions translate into community benefits customized to meet the community's unique needs. Since the entire focus of the Community-Led Work is to revitalize the community as a family center of excellence, that will be the main measure used to evaluate success.

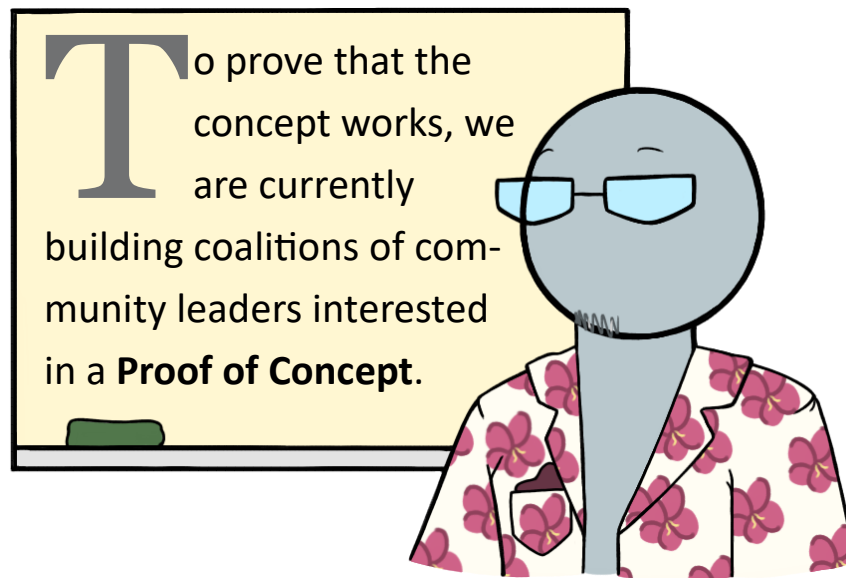
Revitalizing Colorado Family Communities

13. Within a period of two years (est.) the community will have kept its school open (for two years), will have reached a compromise with the district regarding the sustainability/use of the school building and land following the process, and will have received an infusion of resources to achieve a welcoming environment for families.

- As partners, schools, community-mobilizing organizations, public agencies, and community members build and implement a holistic plan to revitalize their community as a family center of excellence.
- Philanthropic and public organizations funnel resources into the community through the implementation of the plan.
- Through a two-year (est.) community-led process, neutrally facilitated and project managed by Surpassing Distinction, a compromise between the community groups is achieved by maximizing community benefits, which *may* include the operational sustainability of neighborhood school(s).



A Proof of Concept



Step 1: Secure funding to gauge interest in communities, school districts, philanthropic organizations, and with civic leaders. This work has started in Sheridan and Denver. Additional sponsorship is necessary to continue the work in both of these communities (\$10,000/month, min 2 months).

Step 2: Receive commitments and secure funding for the Phase I: Initial Project Plan Development (approx. \$370,000).

Step 3: Phase I: Initial Project Plan Development - the Surpassing Distinction team will collaborate with the communities, school districts, philanthropic organizations, and civic leaders to develop a customized community-led plan (4-5 month process).

Step 4: Receive final commitments and funding for Phase II: Proof of Concept Implementation (approx. \$1.2 million per year for two years + small-school subsidies for two years).

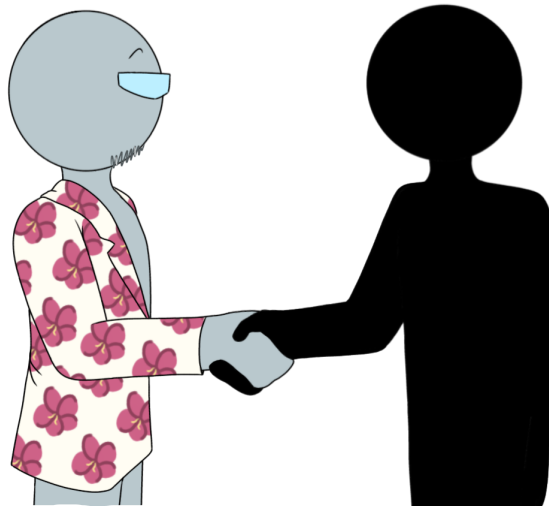
Status Update

This concept has been receiving positive attention since October 2023.

- At the December 2023 CASB conference, we received **30 endorsements** from district leaders to continue the work.
- In January 2024, we were **featured** on the Empowered-Learning-Podcast with Andy Bennetts, M.Ed.
- We **presented** the concept at the CO-CABE conference in February 2024.
- We were **featured** in the April 2024 CASB newsletter.
- We have met with **over 100** school district leaders, community leaders, leaders in education, leaders in nonprofits, and leaders at foundations.
- We received **sponsorship** through RootED to gauge interest in Denver com-

munities in March and April 2024. This work resulted in over 20+ meetings with Denver leaders, a Community Interest Survey, presentations and attendance at various events, feedback on DPS Policy (Executive Limitation 18 - School Closures), and a **Community Advisory Committee** made up of a DPS Board Member, several community leaders, and several executives at community nonprofit organizations. We are seeking additional sponsorship to continue the work in Denver communities.

- We have received **interest and support** from members of the school board and civic leadership in Sheridan city and schools. We are seeking initial sponsorship to continue the work in Sheridan communities as the school district transitions leadership.



Revitalizing Colorado Family Communities

A concept for community-led work in areas impacted by
population shifts and declining enrollment

List of individuals and organizations who have provided feedback

- Dr. Lisa Escarcega, Member of the State Board of Education
- Dr. Debora Scheffel, Member of the State Board of Education
- Dr. Mackenzie Khan, APS Declining Enrollment Leader
- Michael Giles, Superintendent at Aurora Public Schools
- James Roy II, Executive Director of Denver Metro Community Impact
- Erika Martinez, Director of Communications and Engagement at Denver Public Library
- Alan H. Frosh, Co-Founder and Managing Director of Sector Law
- Claire Takhar, Director of Strategic Initiatives and Ty Young Asst. Director of Strategy at Jeffco Schools
- Matt Jordan, CEO of Prosperity Denver Fund
- Rebecca Holmes, CEO; Karen Quanbeck, VP; and Dr. Alex Carter, VP of the Colorado Education Initiative
- Noah Atencio, VP; and Jaime Aguilar, Program Officer of the Colorado Gives Foundation
- Hon. Rhonda Solis, Member of the State Board of Education
- Katie Zaback, VP of Colorado Succeeds
- Richard Tagle, CEO; and Sara Hazel, VP of the Denver Public Schools Foundation
- Ambar Suero, Executive Director at Teach for America
- Pat Donovan, CEO at RootED
- Dr. Jubal Yennie, Executive Director of the Colorado Association of School Boards
- Susana Córdova, Colorado Commissioner of Education
- Marlene De La Rosa, Vice President, DPS Board of Education
- Nicholas Martinez, Executive Director, and Anita Banuelos, Director of Community Mobilizing, at Transform Education Now
- Joanna Rosa-Saenz, Chair of Education at Denver INC
- Vallerie Bustamante, Co-Chair of DPS LEAC
- Pat Sandos, Superintendent, and Sally Daigle, VP Board of Education, at Sheridan Schools
- Krista Spurgin, Executive Director, Stand for Children
- Vanecia Kerr, CIO, Mile High United Way
- Kim Sia, Treasurer, DPS Board of Education

Other notable exposure

- Main feature on the [Empowered Learning Podcast](#) with Andy Bennetts, M.Ed.
- Colorado Association of School Boards conference exhibitor - 30 signed endorsements
- Colorado Association of Bilingual Educators conference presentation
- CASB April Newsletter Feature

Revitalizing Colorado Family Communities

DRAFT