

THE PITON FOUNDATION



THE COMMUNITY INVESTMENT DIVISION OF
GARY-WILLIAMS ENERGY CORPORATION

The School Readiness of Denver's Communities

Community Forum Report

November 2008

The Piton Foundation

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Community Forum on the School Readiness of Denver's Communities

Final Report

This report documents the Community Forum co-sponsored by The Piton Foundation and the Denver Early Childhood Council in Denver, CO on October 8, 2008. Using the publication: *"Are Denver's Neighborhoods Ready for Kids?"* as a springboard for discussion, the forum served to engage local funders, child advocates, government officials and service providers around the school readiness of Denver's neighborhoods. This report provides an overview of the grant funding the project, Piton's local partners in initiating this work, the process for planning the forum, and outcomes of the event.

I. Grant Overview

The School Readiness and Success Initiative

The mission of The Piton Foundation is to provide opportunities for children and families to move from poverty and dependence to self-reliance. As an operating foundation, Piton collaborates with others to conduct and disseminate relevant research, develop initiatives, and work to improve public systems and institutions that serve low-income families.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, in collaboration with the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership and the Urban Institute, awarded The Piton Foundation a grant designed to strengthen and expand data-driven policy advocacy around school readiness and early-grade school success for disadvantaged children and families in low-income neighborhoods in the City and County of Denver. The goals of the School Readiness and Early Grade Success Initiative include:

- Get cities thinking about the field
- Elevate best practices at a national level
- Raise awareness for local decision makers

School Readiness Brief

As a requirement of the grant, Piton prepared a brief (the brief) that uses available local data to compare relevant circumstances of young children in low-income neighborhoods with those in

other neighborhoods in the City and County of Denver. These data were used to draw implications for programs and policies and to describe the key barriers to school readiness and early-grade success for low-income children in Denver.

The brief, titled “*Are Denver’s Neighborhoods Ready for Kids?*,” used the Ready Child Equation (RCE) created by the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative to provide a framework for analyzing the school readiness of Denver’s low-income children.¹ The RCE addresses both children’s skills and their environments, and is based on the multiple factors that influence how prepared young children are for school. This equation includes:

- *Ready Families*: The family context for vulnerable children
- *Ready Communities*: The community resources and supports available to families with young children
- *Ready Services*: The availability, quality and affordability of proven programs that influence child development and school readiness
- *Ready Schools*: The critical elements of schools that influence child development and school success

Community Forum

The grant also required that Piton sponsor a children’s policy forum that engaged local funders, advocates and government officials around the brief. Rather than present the brief to an audience of stakeholders, Piton designed the community forum to align with the philosophies of a “learning community.” This way, participants could be authentically engaged in way that linked data to the dynamic nature of community change. Details around this approach are provided later in the report.

Learning organizations are organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.

Senge, “The Fifth Discipline”, 1990

¹ *The National School Readiness Indicators Initiative: Making Progress for Young Children* (2005) involved teams from 17 states. The initiative was funded by The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, The Kauffman Foundation and The Ford Foundation.

II. Planning the Community Forum

Planning Team

The Piton Foundation provided the leadership for the forum. In the summer of 2008, Piton formed a planning team to help prepare for the event. The team included:

- An independent consultant with local expertise in early childhood systems building and community collaboration.
- The Denver Early Childhood Council (DECC), a membership-based organization that coordinates collaborative decision-making about federal, state, local and philanthropic early childhood education financial resources in Denver. DECC members include government officials and providers of early childhood health, mental health and early learning services.
- The Civic Canopy, a Denver-based nonprofit that promotes a deeper understanding of civic challenges and more effective ways to solve them through community dialogues and collaborative projects.

Planning Process

The Planning Team met multiples times from August through October 2008 to design the forum. Initial meetings involved identifying outcomes, which included:

- Raise awareness of the status and success of school readiness in neighborhoods throughout the City and County of Denver.
- Inform community stakeholders about the work of The Piton Foundation's Data Initiative.
- Dialogue with forum attendees about the role of data in decision-making and strategic planning.
- Generate ideas about how the DECC can use the information presented in the brief to be more effective in their programming.

These outcomes were used to draft an agenda (**Appendix A**). The agenda was designed to support the multiple learning and dialogue styles of the stakeholders in the room. This meant providing time for inquiry (where questions are posed to guide the audience's thinking), small group work and one-on-one dialogue – the fundamental principles of a learning community.

Participants

The invitation list included DECC members. In addition, stakeholders from state and city government were invited, as were individuals from the local foundation community and partners who contributed to the brief (**Appendix B**). The forum was held in a community-friendly room of a public library that is centrally located in Denver. Invitations were emailed a month before the event and over 60 RSVPs were received.

III. Proceedings of the Community Forum

Demographic Trends of Neighborhoods and Children

The forum's first session involved a presentation by Piton on the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership and the details of the School Readiness and Success Initiative. In addition, the presentation included an explanation of how the brief organized the multiple neighborhoods of Denver into five sub-areas. Piton also explained how the brief was framed around the "Ready Child Equation."

Ready Families + Ready Communities + Ready Services + Ready Schools = Ready Child

Next, following an inquiry method, Piton discussed the data sets used to describe areas in Denver where low-income children are concentrated. Piton then provided an overview of Denver's families by discussing the population changes and demographic shifts in Denver's neighborhoods from 1990 through 2006. Forum attendees saw where a growth in density among low-income children (newborn to eight years old) has occurred, and how the racial/ethnic makeup of Denver's children has changed over the past 20 years (**Attachment C**).

Neighborhood Data Teams

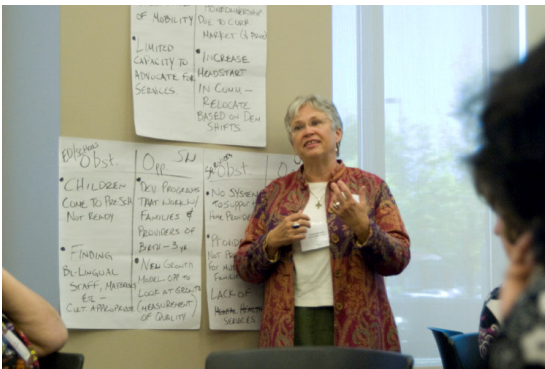
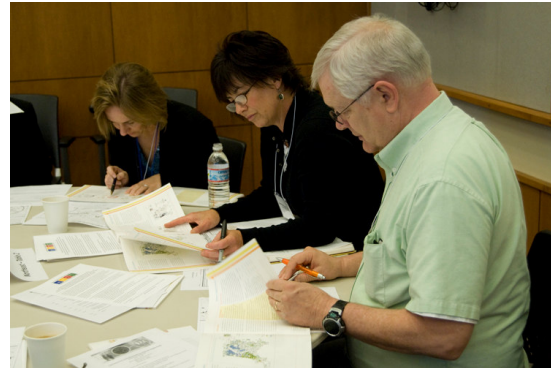
Forum participants broke into "data teams" of eight to 10 people. Each team represented one of the five sub-regions of Denver (southeast, southwest, northwest, central northeast and far northeast). Teams reviewed the communities, services and schools within the area they represented. The goal of this session was to



encourage attendees to spend time exploring the content and organization of the brief, and then as a larger group provide each other with an analysis of what they learned from the data.

Members of the Planning Team posed the data teams with the following set of questions:

- What is your definition of “Ready Communities/Services/Schools”?
- What information do the maps convey about the opportunities for children in your neighborhood?
- What do the maps suggest about the resources available to the children living in the neighborhood?
- What do the different colors and symbols represent?
- Overall, how likely are the children in your neighborhood to be able to access excellent educational opportunities?
- What might be an example of how these opportunities, or the lack of these resources, influence the lives of children living in your neighborhood?
- Based on your answers to the previous questions, and on any other data you have reviewed in the brief, list some important obstacles and opportunities in your sub-area in terms of it having “Ready Communities/Services/Schools.”



Data teams presented their responses to the larger group, which then provided a city-wide look at what the data in the brief meant relative to the Ready Child Equation. This exercise also allowed for a broader conversation on additional data that would be useful in understanding the current trends and issues within Denver’s early childhood system.

Web-Based Application

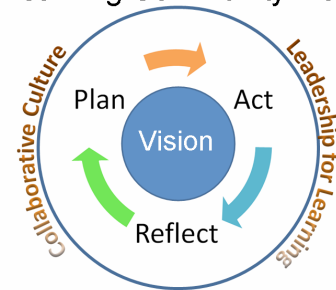
Piton developed an interactive web site to serve as a supplement to the maps in the publication (http://216.93.173.151/community_map/piton_map/index.html). In presenting the tool, Piton explained how the interactive application allows individuals to look at one or more of the services outlined in the brief in comparison to Denver neighborhoods with concentrations of

low-income children. During this presentation, Piton demonstrated how the tool is organized, how to use the mapping and demographic layers, and how to navigate the variables, text and service providers embedded within the tool.

Data and Learning Communities

In wrapping up the work of the data teams, the forum facilitator asked for “a-ha moments” or trends that teams saw. As one participant stated, “This data gives us what we needed to confirm what we know. In particular, the areas where the greatest concentrations of vulnerable children live are not where the services exist. This brief puts the issue very visibly in front of us.” Another person felt that “this study puts arms, legs and faces on the issue of how to explain school readiness and the barriers kids in Denver face.”

A Learning Community Model



The Civic Canopy then presented the data in the larger context of learning. Using a familiar metaphor to early childhood professionals, the facilitator spoke about how the maps of data in Denver are like looking at maps of the brain. Learning at the individual level creates connections between brain cells, and learning within networks creates connections among partners. This shared learning – a “learning community model” – grows

leadership and creates the capacity to produce results. Citing early and second wave research from leadership experts (Senge, Demming, Garvin, Hicks, Larson), the facilitator identified key elements for a successful learning organization:

- New, expansive thinking and alternative views are nurtured
- Continual learning is supported, allowing people to see the whole together
- Safe environment exists where people can disagree
- Learning process is concrete enough to identify and solve problems
- Leadership reinforces learning by engaging in questions and active listening
- All stakeholders are included and valued
- Process is collaborative and perceived as fair and authentic

Using these key concepts, the data teams were asked to reflect on the learning model as it related to the information provided in the brief. Specifically, teams were asked: “If you were a learning community, what would you do a year from now? How do you re-vision your plans to come together and learn as a network?” The larger group reconvened and many shared their thinking and questions about next steps for the work in terms of collaboration, leadership, governance and data.

Collaboration and Leadership

- How do we maintain and diffuse passion and interest in collaboration in spite of all the obstacles?
- How do the collaborators better collaborate?
- Could this information lead to a mobilized campaign that supports DECC goals similar to what other cities have done?
- This could be a huge agenda for the community – how do you get your arms around it?
- Can we leverage resources with Piton’s support?
- What other partners need to see and understand this brief?

Governance

- How can we create concrete next steps from this information?
- Can the DECC Program Committee focus on this?
- What is the role of the Mental Health Action Alliance?
- Do we need regional or neighborhood experts at the DECC table?
- Can folks that represent each domain or indicator review the data together and come back to the DECC with recommendations?
- We don’t want to sit around and talk about theoretical ideas – what tangible, specific outcomes are needed?

Data and Infrastructure

- How do we move forward with best practices?
- How can we use the brief as a frame for all of our discussions?
- Are we in the right places doing the right stuff?
- Do we need additional mapping?
- What other city tools and data exist that might be missing?
- Can we share this information with city planners?
- Who can move this process forward?
- Can we use these data as a way to gauge our progress and continuous improvement?

- How do we use these data in our own organizations?

This session was ended by encouraging participants to use the data in the brief as an opportunity to build a learning community through the DECC.

IV. Synopsis of the Results

The Planning Team had a debriefing meeting after the forum to discuss lessons learned and identify next steps. Given the limited time, the members agreed that the design of the day optimally succeeded in raising awareness about the status of school readiness in Denver's neighborhoods, addressing barriers, and outlining possible steps for using data to make strategic decisions. Specifically, the work of the small groups gave forum attendees the opportunity to safely dive into the details of the data. The forum also allowed for a broader conversation that combined realities presented by the data with the anecdotal perspectives of community stakeholders.

This forum offered another opportunity to engage individuals in learning from the deliverables of Piton's School Readiness and Success Initiative. The work of the forum also helped Piton identify several opportunities to extend this work locally. These opportunities include:

1. Diving deeper into the early learning data by working with the Denver Mayors Office of Education and Children (MOEC) to assemble data on the location of family, friends and neighbors providing home-based child care services to children (particularly infants and toddlers). MOEC develops programs to reflect the Mayor of Denver's commitment to support the successful education of the City's children, and therefore has extensive partnerships with child care providers throughout the city.
2. Partnering with The Denver Mental Health Action Alliance to assemble more data in identifying gaps in mental health services for low-income families with children. This newly formed alliance of mental health services providers in Denver is looking at early childhood mental health systems integration, and has access to data on many providers.
3. Teaming with the Colorado Children's Healthcare Access Program (a nonprofit that ensures every low-income child in Colorado receives comprehensive healthcare from a primary care provider), The Colorado Trust (a local provider in Denver that specifically funds health care projects) and the Colorado Early Childhood Councils to extend the sections of the brief concentrating on health services in Denver statewide.

Appendix A – Agenda



Community Forum on the School Readiness of Denver's Neighborhoods

Wednesday, October 8th

8:30 – 12:30

Blair Caldwell Research Library

2401 Welton Street

Denver, CO 80205

8:30	Networking and Light Breakfast
9:00	Introductions
9:30	Demographic Trends of Neighborhoods and Children Matthew Barry, Piton Foundation
9:45	Neighborhood Data Teams – Review of the School Readiness Brief
10:40	Community Opportunities and Obstacles
11:10	Demonstration of Piton's Web-Based Application of the School Readiness Brief Lisa Montagu, Piton Foundation
11:25	Data & Learning Communities – Discussion of Next Steps Bill Fulton, Civic Canopy
12:00	Light Lunch and Informal Discussion
12:30	Adjourn

Appendix B – Participants

Participants of the community forum in Denver included stakeholders from state and city government, individuals from the local foundation community, and nonprofit organizations that serve families with children in Denver. Below is a description of each organization that attended the forum.

Early Childhood Education Providers

Denver Mayors Office of Education and Children	Develops programs and projects to reflect the Mayor of Denver's commitment to support the successful education of the City's children and to strengthen the City's partnership with Denver Public Schools.
Qualistar Early Learning	A state-wide childcare and preschool resource and referral network for programs that serve children birth to age 12.
Denver Preschool Program	Provides parents in Denver with a tuition credit to use at the preschool of their choice.
Denver Great Kids and Rocky Mountain SER Head Start Agencies	Provide early childhood services to low income preschool children and their families in Denver.
Mile High Montessori Early Learning Centers	Provide quality early childhood education for low-income children to prepare them for school.
Denver Public Schools Early Learning Department	The early childhood education department for the Denver Public School district.
Clayton Early Learning Center	Provides early childhood services to children (birth to five) and their families; also trains early childhood professionals.
Making Connections – Denver (School Readiness staff)	Works with a strong coalition of residents and local partners to improve the lives of vulnerable children and families in four diverse Denver neighborhoods.

Health/Mental Health Providers

Colorado Children's Healthcare Access Program	Ensures that low income children throughout Colorado receive comprehensive healthcare from a primary care provider.
Invest in Kids	Partners with communities in Colorado to improve the health and well-being of Colorado's children (prenatal to age eight), particularly through advancing programs that work.

Funders

The Colorado Trust	A grant making foundation with the vision of providing access to health care for all Coloradans.
Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation	A philanthropic organization supporting the positive development of children in Colorado through grants.
Cydney and Tom Marsico Family Foundation	A Colorado foundation that focuses on youth services, homelessness and education.

Government Agencies/Officials

Denver Department of Human Services	Protects abused and neglected children and adults by making sure they live in safe environments and helping both individuals and families in crisis.
Office of the Lieutenant Governor	Staff from the second-highest-ranking member of the executive department of the Colorado state government, below only the Governor of Colorado.
Denver City Council	Aide to Councilman Doug Linkhart

Appendix C – Presentation Materials

Community Forum

On the School Readiness of Denver's Neighborhoods



Sponsored By:



The Child Readiness Equation

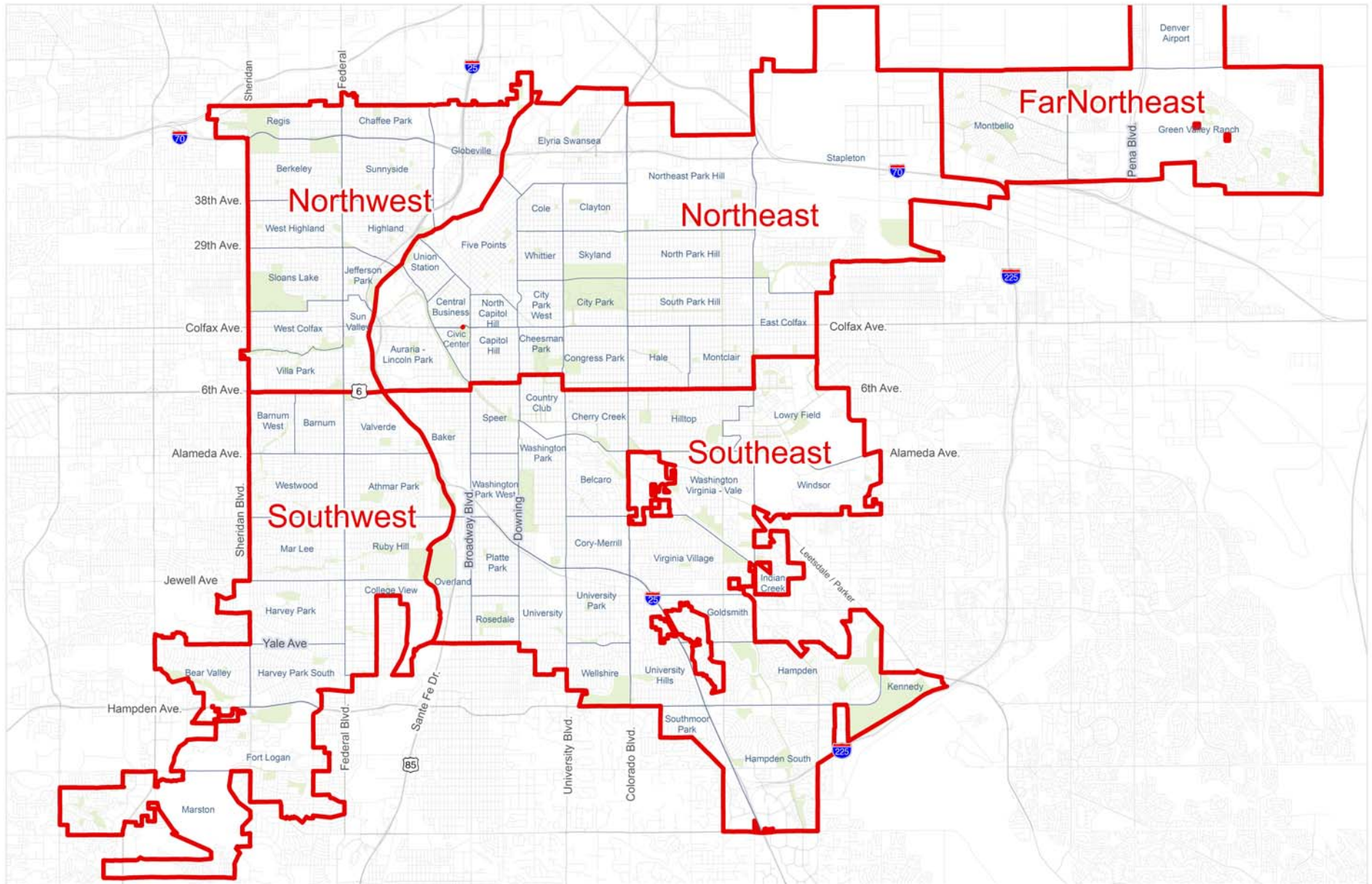
Ready Families + Ready Communities + Ready Services + Ready Schools = Ready Children

Ready
Services

Across the Smart Start /Early Childhood Colorado
Framework's 4 domains:

1. Early Learning
2. Health
3. Social, Emotional and Mental Health
4. Family Support & Parent Education

Denver's Neighborhoods and Subareas

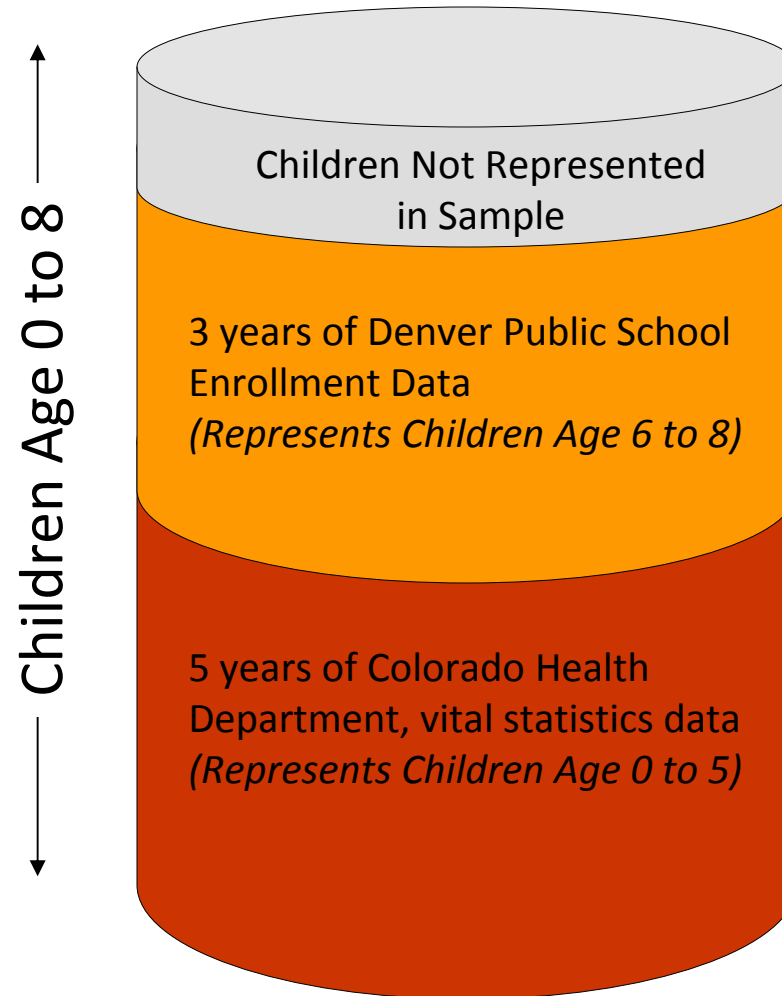


Ready Families

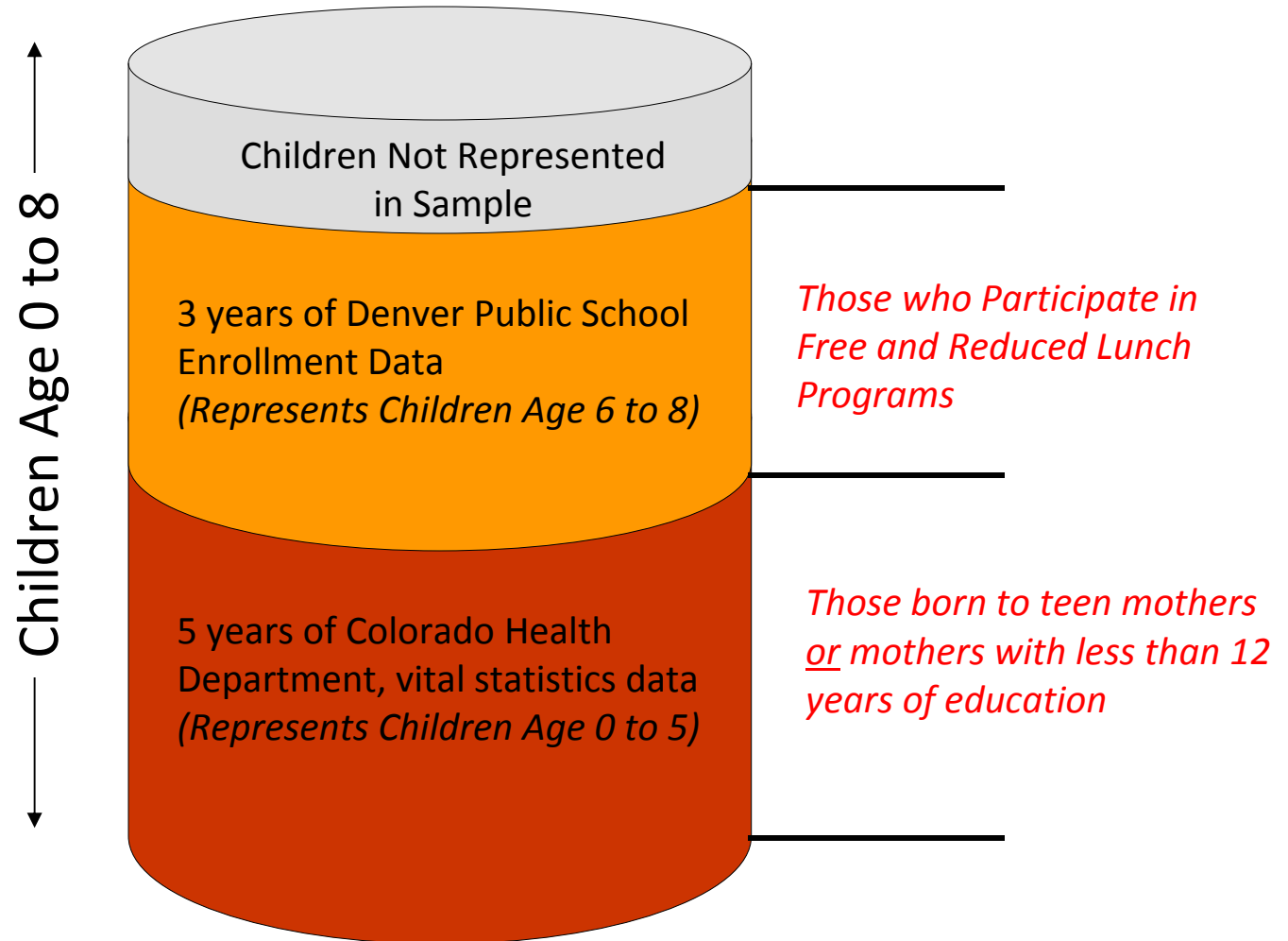
(The family context for vulnerable children)



Defining the Sample of All Children Age 0 to 8



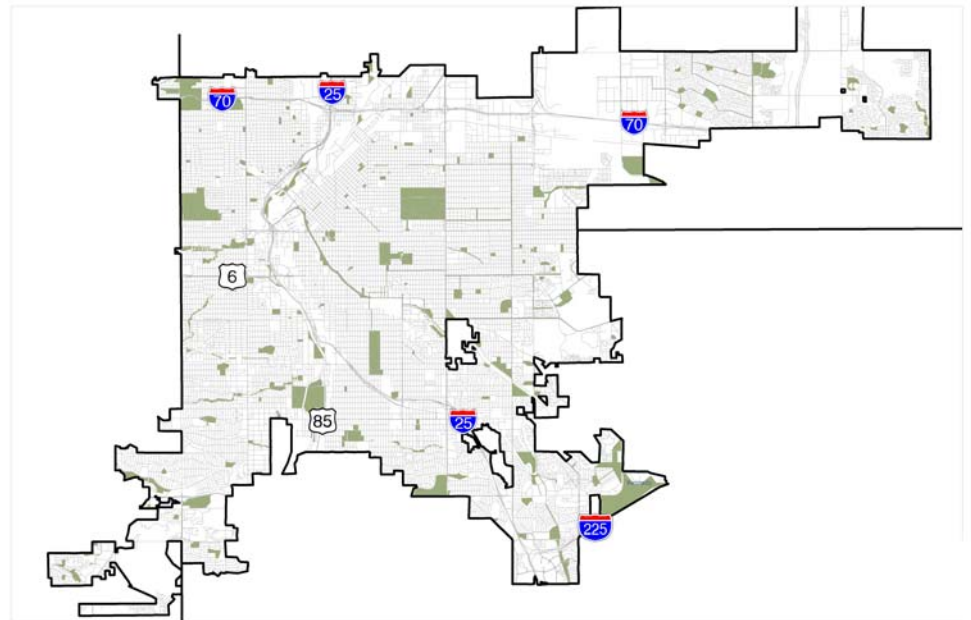
Defining the Sample of Vulnerable Children Age 0 to 8



How large is the sample of all children age 0 to 8?

- a. 49,000
- b. 69,000
- c. 99,000

Looking at the map to the right, which areas of Denver would you guess have the highest concentration of all children?



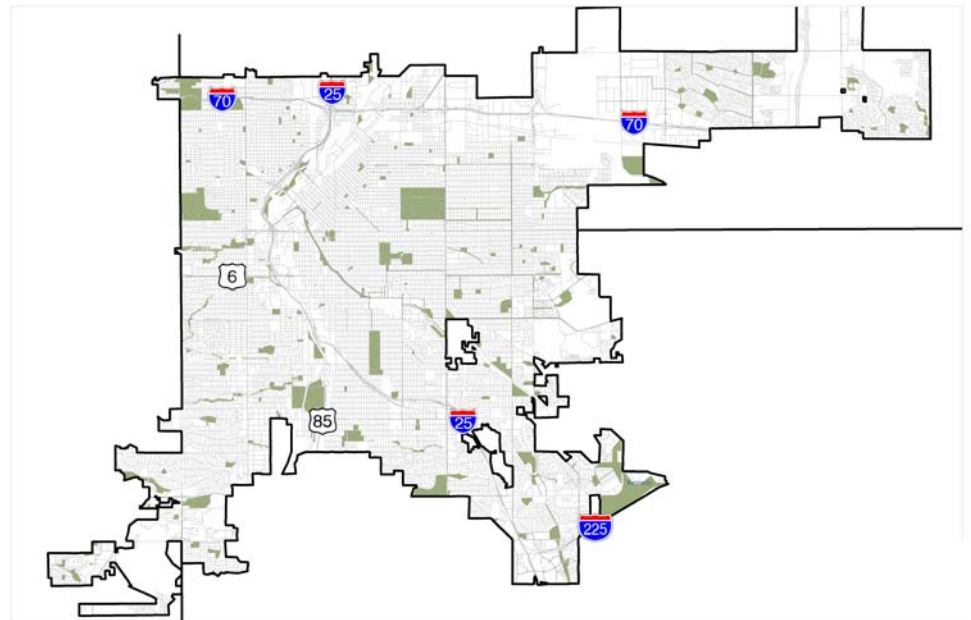
How large is the sample of all children age 0 to 8?

a. 49,000

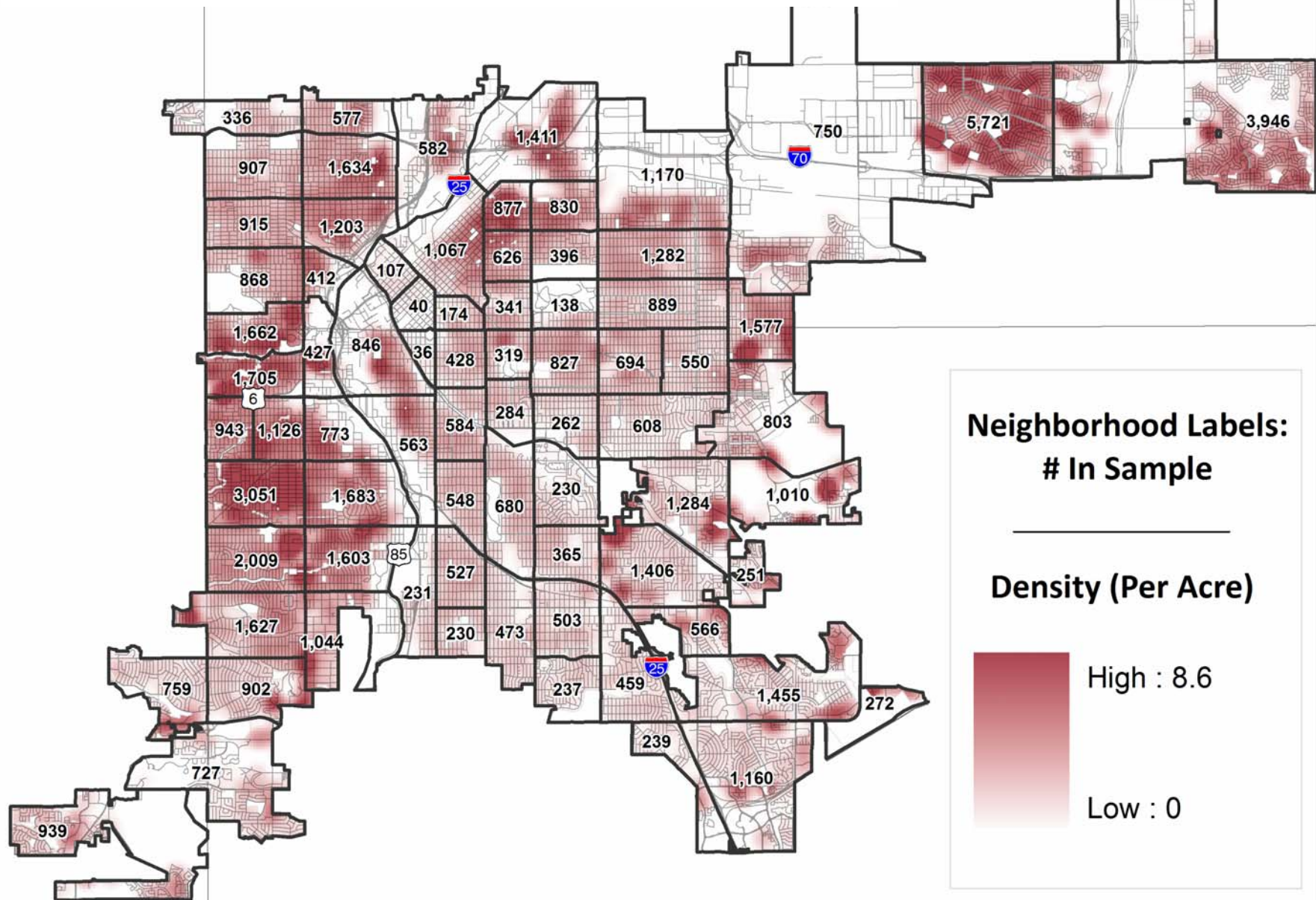
b. 69,000

c. 99,000

Looking at the map to the right, which areas of Denver would you guess have the highest concentration of all children?



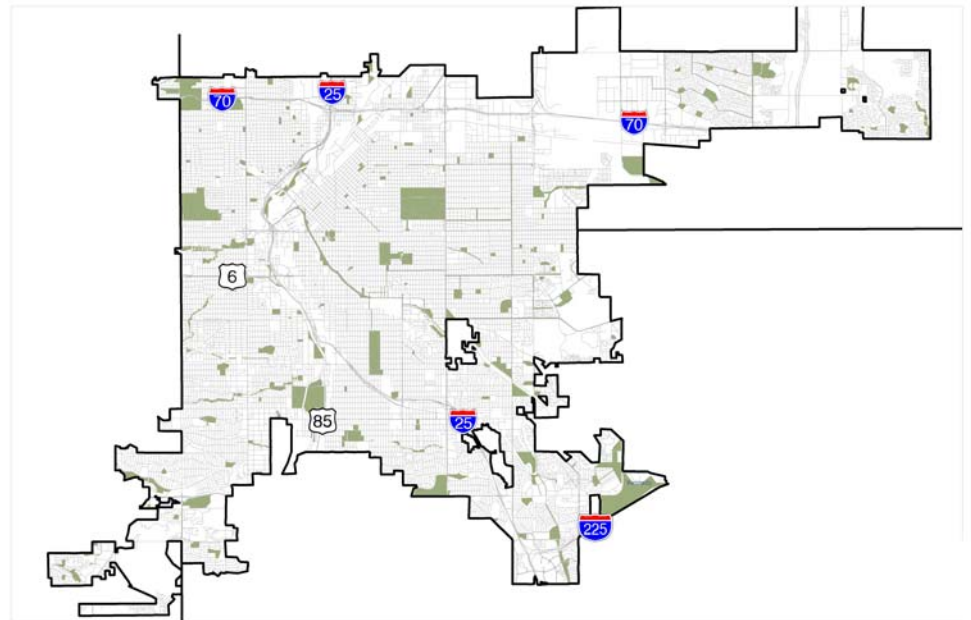
2006 Sample of All Children Age 0 to 8



How did the sample of all children age 0 to 8 change between 2001 and 2006?

- a. decrease of 5,700
- b. no change
- c. increase of 5,700

Looking at the map to the right, which areas of Denver would you guess have had increasing / decreasing concentrations of all children?



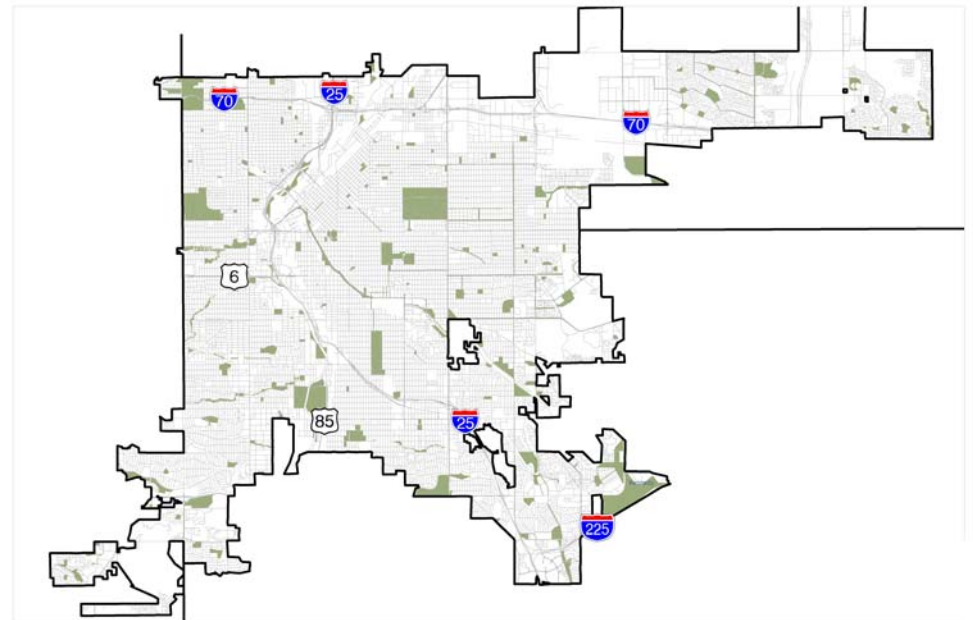
How did the sample of all children age 0 to 8 change between 2001 and 2006?

a. decrease of 5,700

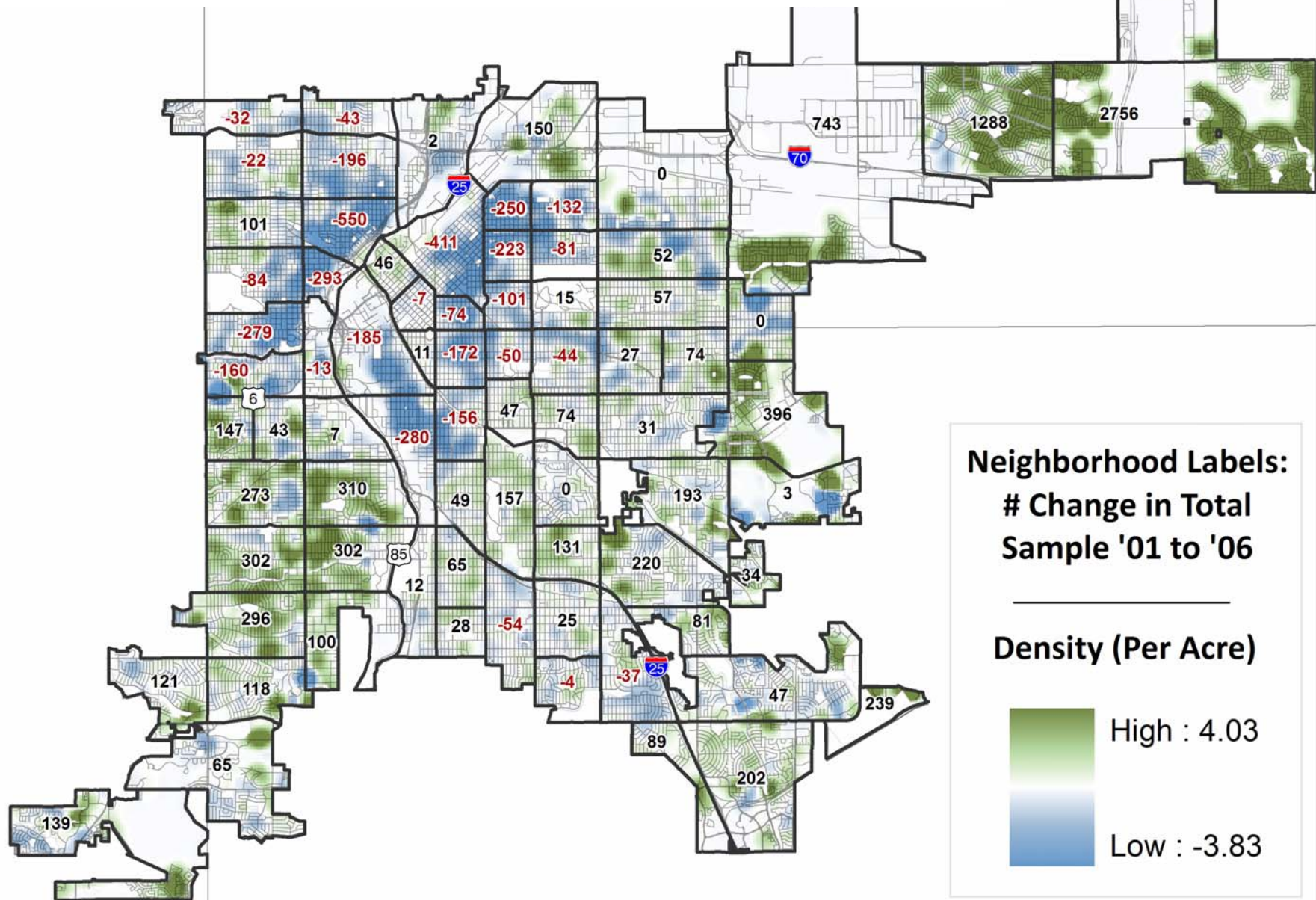
b. no change

c. increase of 5,700

Looking at the map to the right, which areas of Denver would you guess have had increasing / decreasing concentrations of all children?



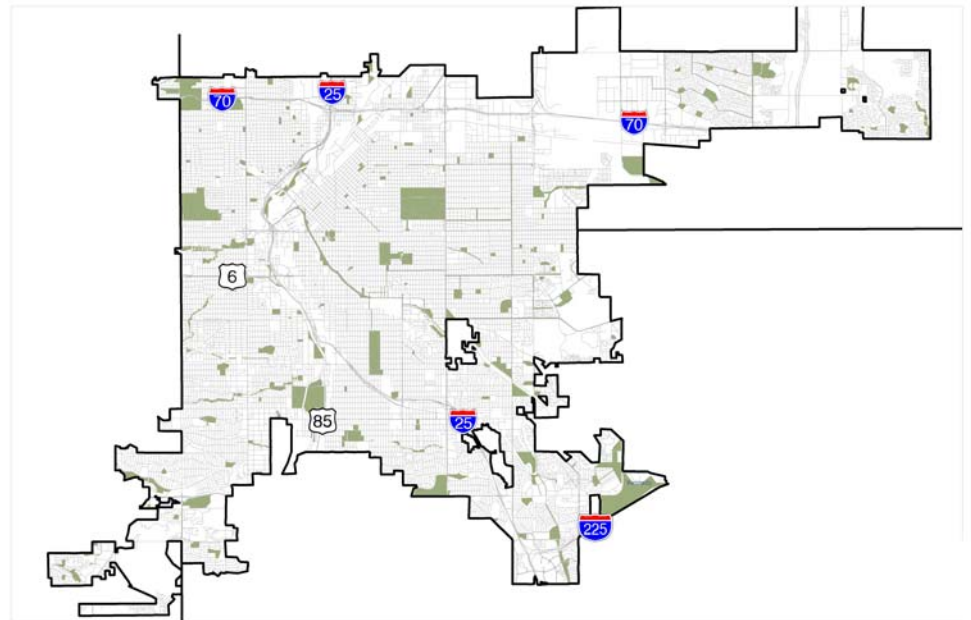
Change in Sample of All Children Age 0 to 8



How large is the sample of vulnerable children age 0 to 8?

- a. 13,000
- b. 33,000
- c. 53,000

Looking at the map to the right, which areas of Denver would you guess have the highest concentration of vulnerable children?



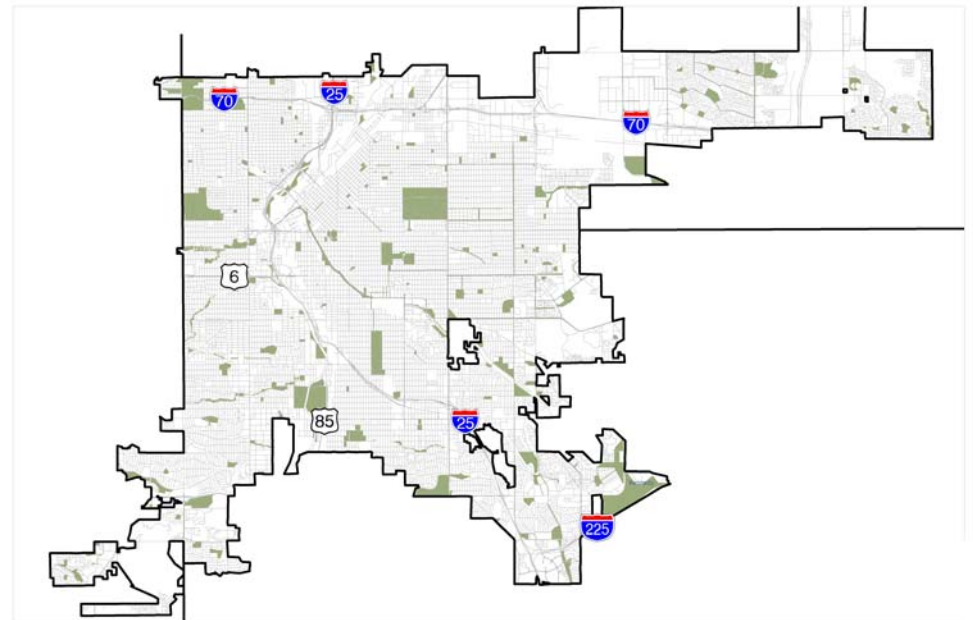
How large is the sample of vulnerable children age 0 to 8?

a. 13,000

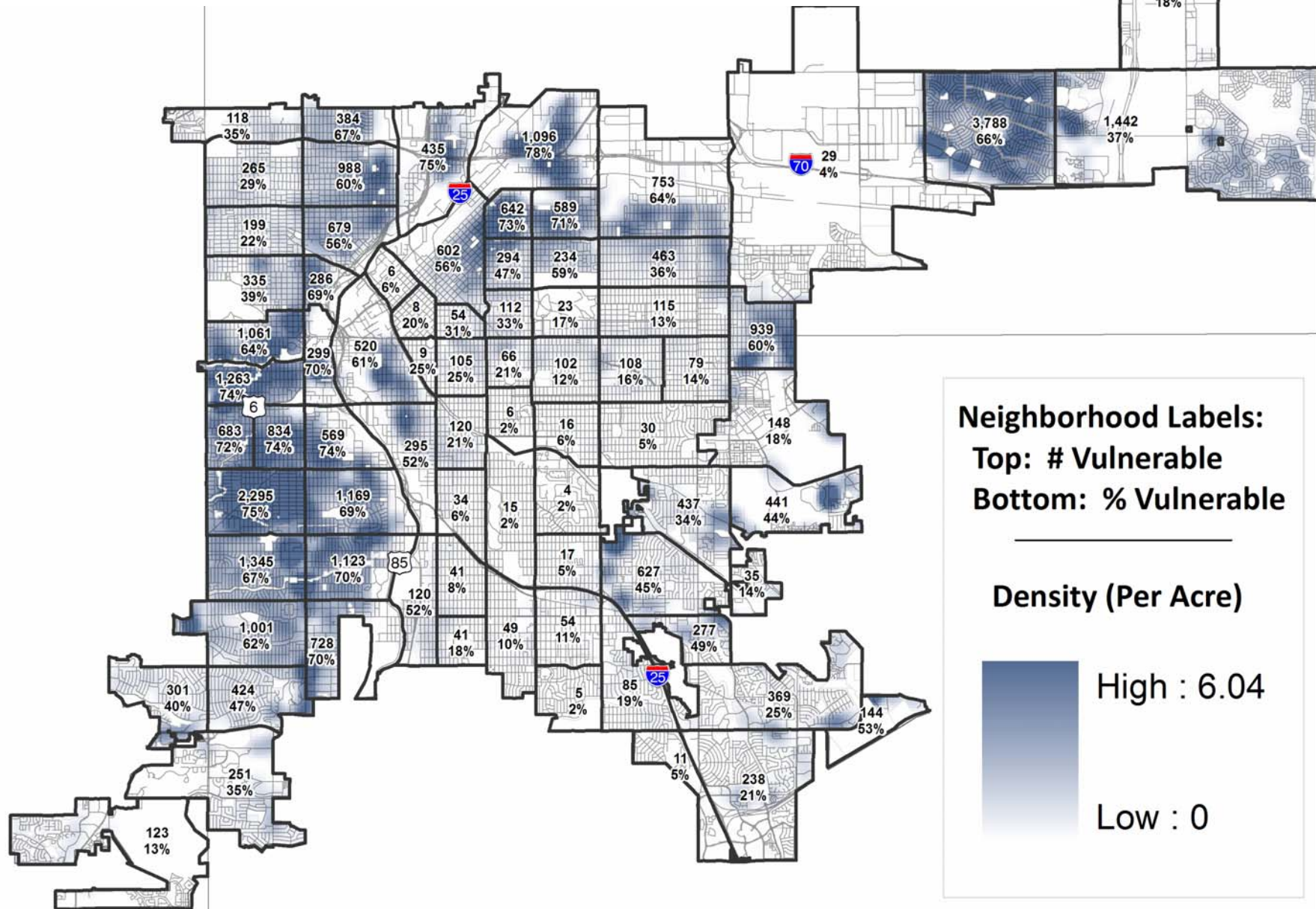
b. 33,000

c. 53,000

Looking at the map to the right, which areas of Denver would you guess have the highest concentration of vulnerable children?



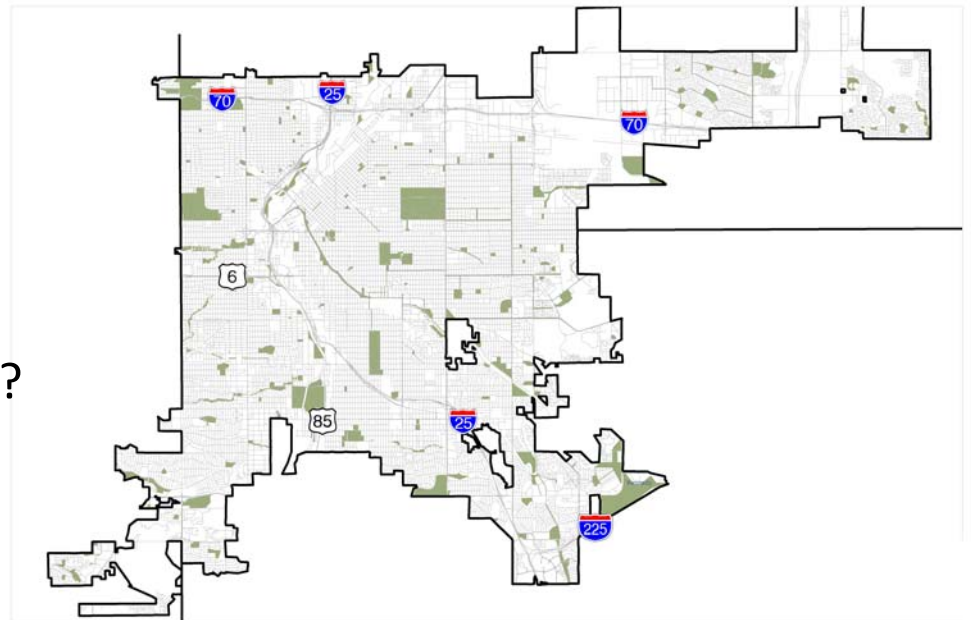
2006 Sample of Vulnerable Children Age 0 to 8



How did the sample of vulnerable children age 0 to 8 change between 2001 and 2006?

- a. decrease of 2,200
 - b. no change
 - c. increase of 2,200
-

Looking at the map to the right, which areas of Denver would you guess have had increasing / decreasing concentrations of vulnerable children?



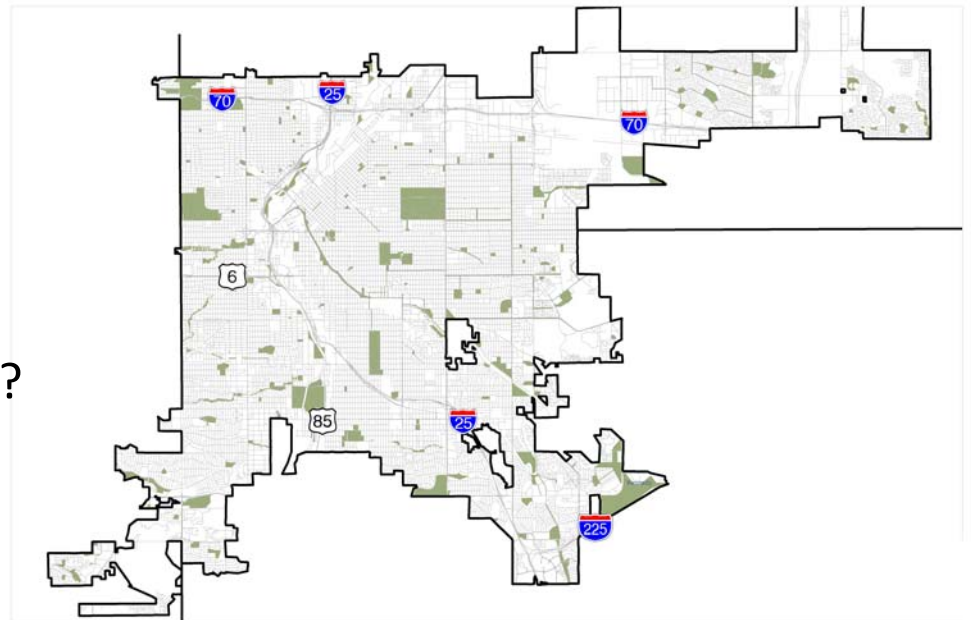
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a. decrease of 2,200

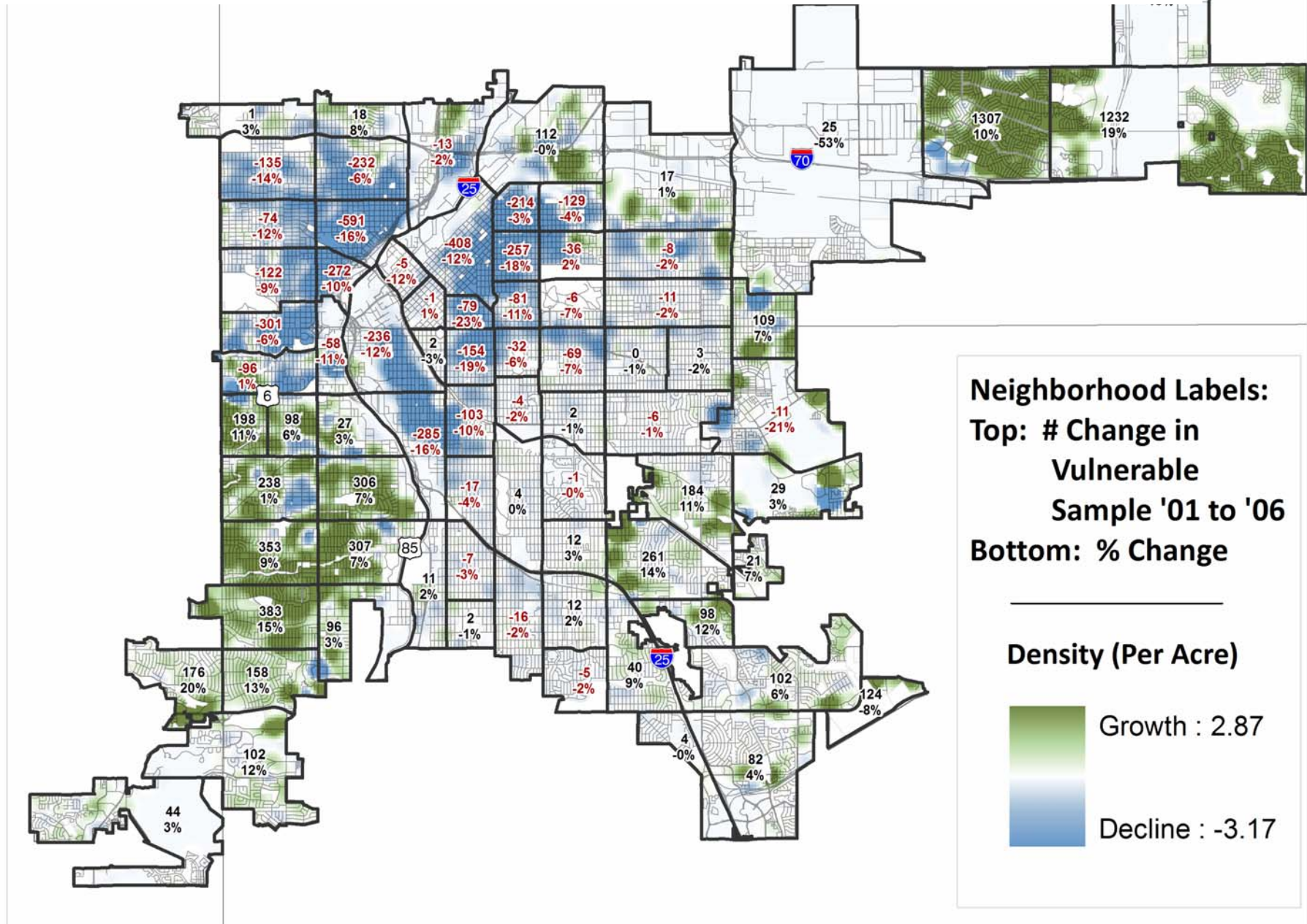
b. no change

c. increase of 2,200

Looking at the map to the right, which areas of Denver would you guess have had increasing / decreasing concentrations of vulnerable children?

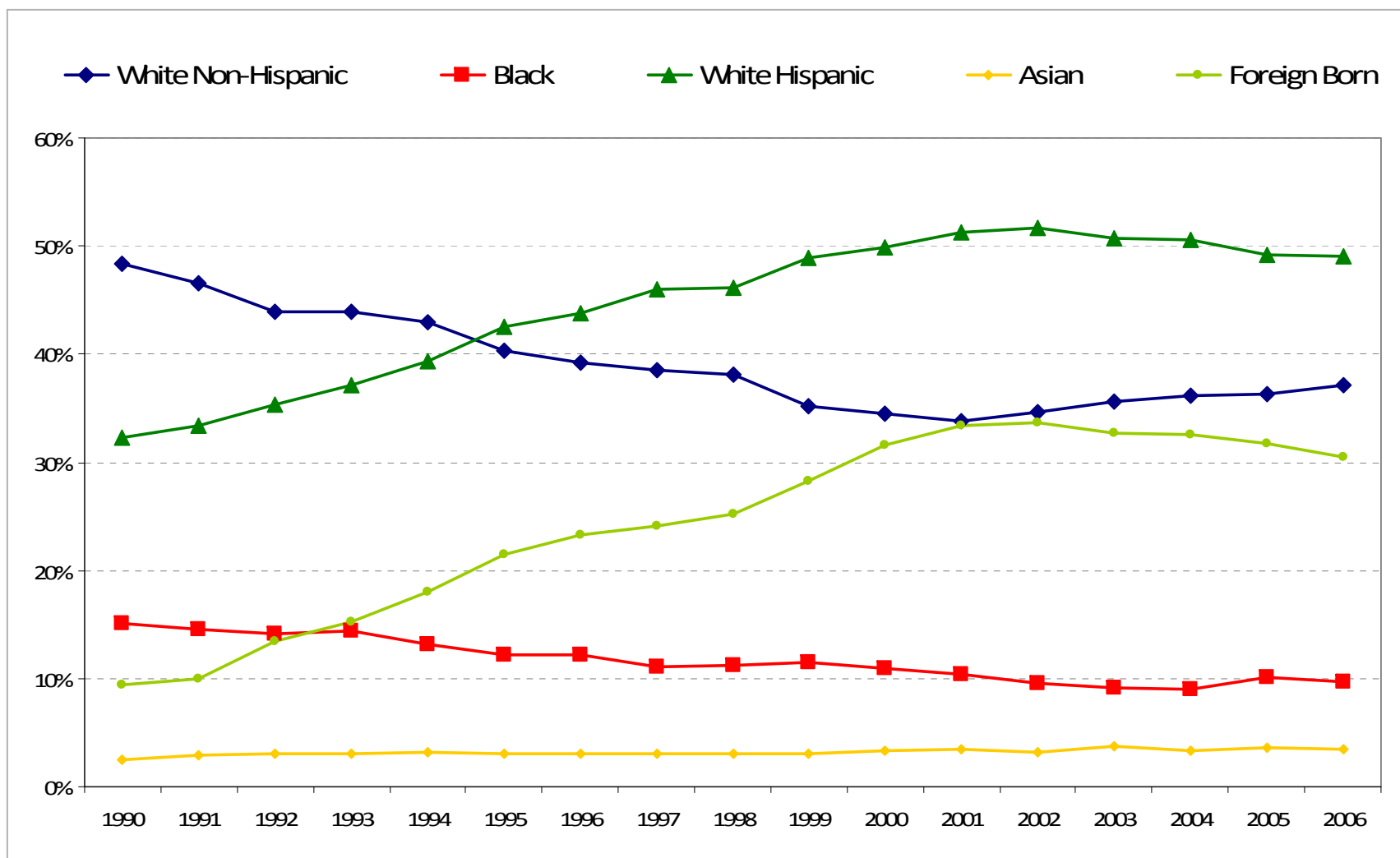


Change in Sample of Vulnerable Children Age 0 to 8



Changing Demographics

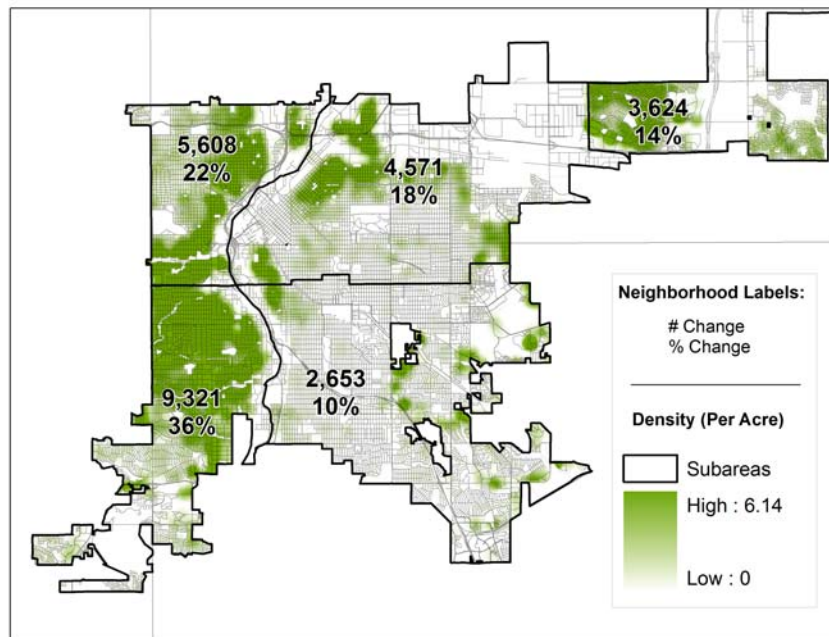
Percent of All Children Born by Race/Ethnicity 1990 - 2006



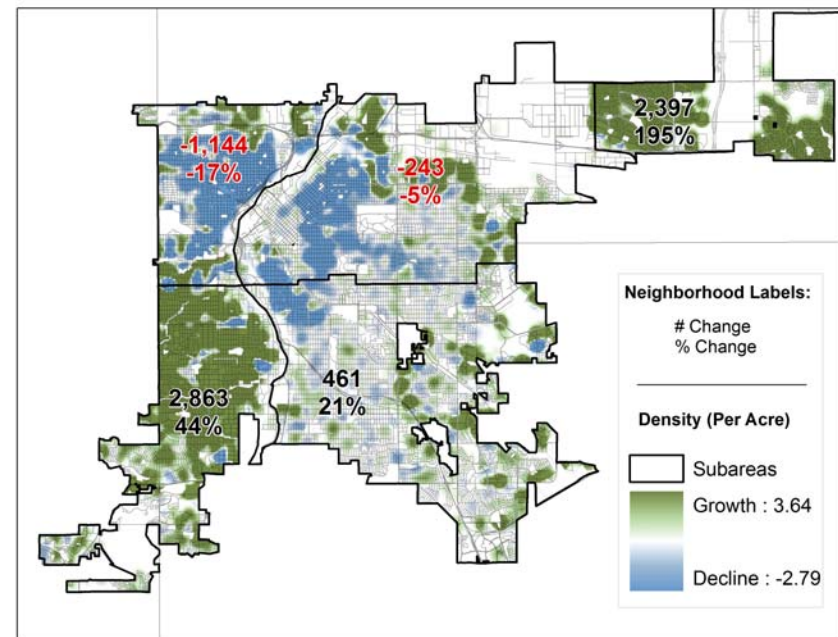
Note: Race and Ethnicity Defined according to Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Definitions

Children Born to Hispanic Mothers

Births to Hispanics 2002-2006



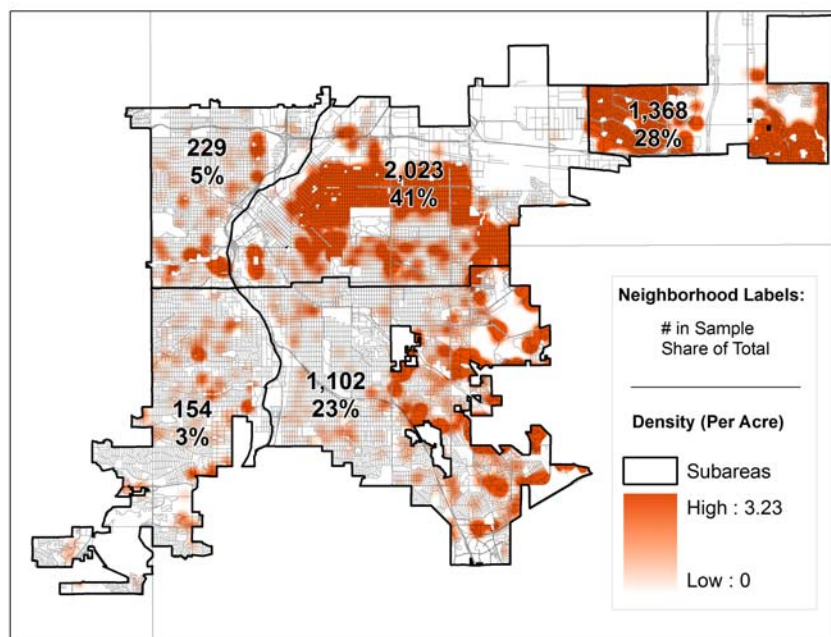
Births to Hispanics between 1996 and 2000 compared to between 2002-2006



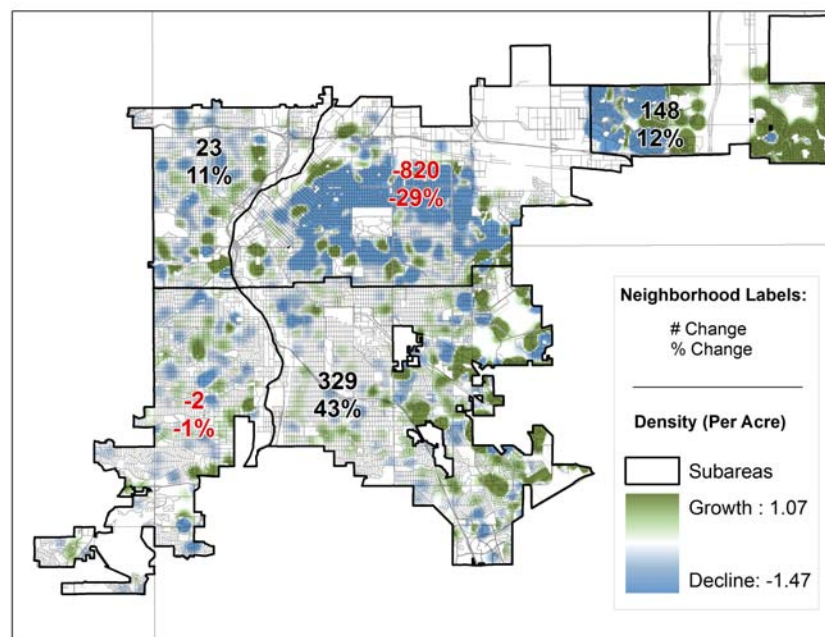
Note: Race and Ethnicity Defined according to Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Definitions

Children Born to African American Mothers

Births to African Americans 2002-2006



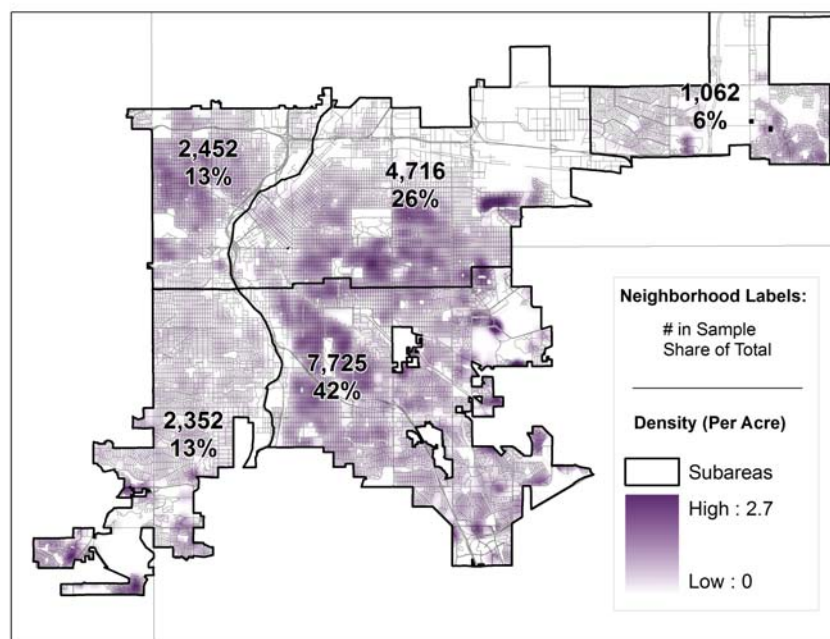
Births to Afr. Americans between 1996 & 2000 compared to between 2002-2006



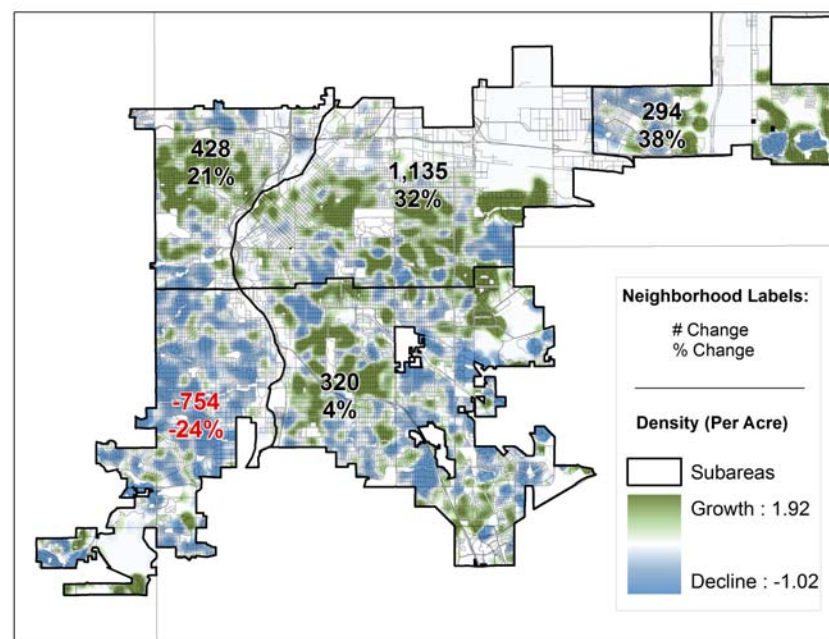
Note: Race and Ethnicity Defined according to Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Definitions

Children Born to White Non-Hispanic (NH) Mothers

Births to White NH 2002-2006



Births to White NH between 1996 and 2000 compared to between 2002-2006



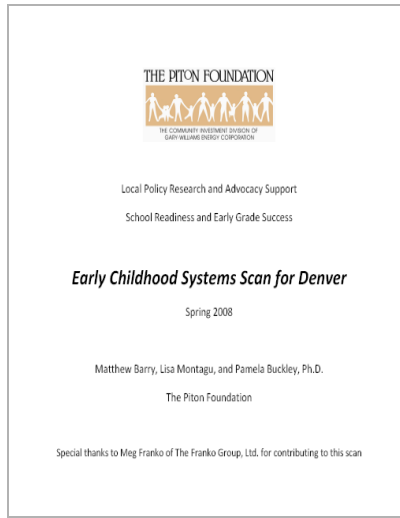
Note: Race and Ethnicity Defined according to Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Definitions

Summary: Ready Families

- About 48% (or 33,000) of the children included in the brief were identified as vulnerable
- Highest concentration of vulnerable children are in southwest and far northeast Denver. Meanwhile, the northwest and central areas are decreasing in density of vulnerable children.
- Children born to Hispanic mothers are the most quickly growing portion of all children.

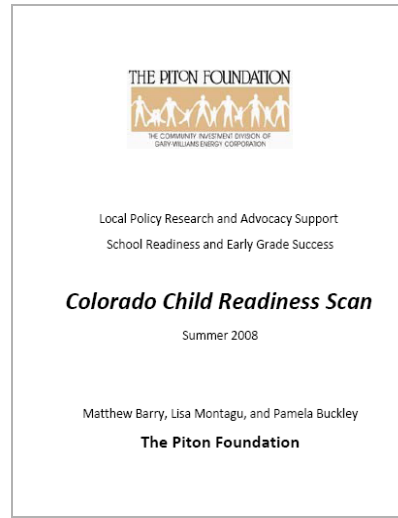
Demographic transition and neighborhood lifecycles are a natural process and will continue to change the portrait of Denver's communities. For those working to improve child outcomes, it is vital to understand the changing demographics of Denver's families. Increased foresight and planning will open the door for culturally appropriate services.

Summary of Deliverables



Colorado Child Readiness Scan

This report describes the role and scope of services of early childhood providers in Denver, how well these organizations collaborate, and what types of data are available across the system.



Early Childhood Systems Scan for Denver

This report outlines early childhood services in Colorado, including early care and education; health; mental health; and, parent/family support services (January 2008).



Are Denver's Communities Ready for Kids?

This study by uses available data to compare circumstances of children in Denver's low-income neighborhoods with those in other neighborhoods to describe the key barriers to school readiness for low-income children.

For More Information

Contact

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Lisa Montagu lmontagu@piton.org

The Brief and a web-based, interactive tool can be found at www.piton.org and look under the Publications section.

