

Johns Hopkins University

Diplomas Now

DOES DIPLOMAS NOW INCREASE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES AND COLLEGE READINESS?

Project Overview

THE PROBLEM: What Challenge Did the Program Try to Address?

Nearly 30% of low-income students do not finish high school within four years. Dropout rates are particularly high in low-income urban areas. Dropouts are more likely than graduates to earn lower incomes, live in poverty, have poor health, be incarcerated, and rely on social services. To help increase high school graduate rates and college and career readiness among urban students, three organizations (Talent Development Secondary, City Year, and Communities in Schools) jointly started Diplomas Now.¹

THE PROJECT: What Strategies Did the Program Employ?

Johns Hopkins University, acting as a representative for the Diplomas Now partnership, received an i3 validation grant (2010-2015) to expand the program from a few schools to more than 30 middle and high schools in more than 10 school districts. The partners conducted a randomized control trial (RCT) of its whole-school reform in 62 secondary schools in 11 school districts. The study assessed the extent to which its targeted intervention for students who display early-warning indicators of dropping out (e.g., attendance, behavior, grades) increases high school completion, improves college and career readiness, and promotes structural change, as well as curricular and instructional reform in participating schools.

¹ Johns Hopkins University received an i3 validation grant supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation program through Grant Number U396B100257. Validation grants provide funding to support the expansion of projects that address persistent education challenges to the regional or national level. All i3 grantees are required to conduct rigorous evaluations of their projects. The quality of evidence required to demonstrate a project's effectiveness depends on a project's level of scale or grant type.

THE DIPLOMAS NOW MODEL

- **Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development (PD).** PD for teachers, including a peer coaching system for teachers, and curricular materials that align with college- and career-ready standards.
- **Tiered Student Supports.** Supports include tutoring, mentoring, near-peer role modeling, after-school programs, and case management as well as needs assessment, counseling, and specialized interventions for students who need additional support.
- **Trained Facilitators.** The model provides data, organizational and instructional support, and a school transformation facilitator, instructional facilitators and coaches, a team of near-peer AmeriCorps volunteers, and a case manager.
- **Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities.** Participating schools reorganize into small groups of teachers serving the same group of students.

Summary of Results

DOES DIPLOMAS NOW INCREASE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES AND COLLEGE READINESS?

At the time that this summary was written, there was no final report available with graduation rate and college readiness results.

- **INTERIM RESULTS.** Results shared in the interim report show that Diplomas Now did not have statistically significant impacts on 6th- and 9th-grade students' average attendance rates, days seriously disciplined, or course passing rates. In terms of composite measures of attendance, behavior, and course performance.
- **EARLY-WARNING INDICATORS.** There was a positive and statistically significant impact on the percentage of 6th grade students with no early-warning indicators.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- **EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATION.** Diplomas Now schools were successful at recruiting, retaining, and training the auxiliary staff members needed to implement the program effectively, using data to identify at-risk students, and planning and providing interventions for those students.
- **LEARNING COMMUNITIES.** Schools enjoyed moderate success in establishing small learning communities, but many schools also encountered difficulty in holding frequent meetings of these communities' interdisciplinary teams of teachers.
- **EARLY WARNING.** Most schools successfully established a data tracking system for student attendance, behavior, and course performance in math and English Language Achievement (ELA). Most schools were also successful at promoting collaboration among staff tasked with planning and providing interventions for students with early-warning indicators.
- **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.** Diplomas Now schools were less successful at providing teachers with peer coaching, implementing curricular additions, and involving parents and community members in school activities and decisions.
- **SCHOOL POLICY AND CULTURE.** Schools struggled to implement goals that required changing school policy or structure or gaining the support of the school's staff.
- **COACHING.** Many schools had difficulty achieving consistent coaching for math and ELA teachers at the Diplomas Now target level. Most schools also did not provide struggling students with the prescribed academic foundations and accelerated remediation classes.
- **COMMUNITY.** Schools generally did not achieve intended levels of implementation for getting parents and community members involved.

Please see Appendices B and C for information about the evaluation's design and the quality of the evidence, respectively.

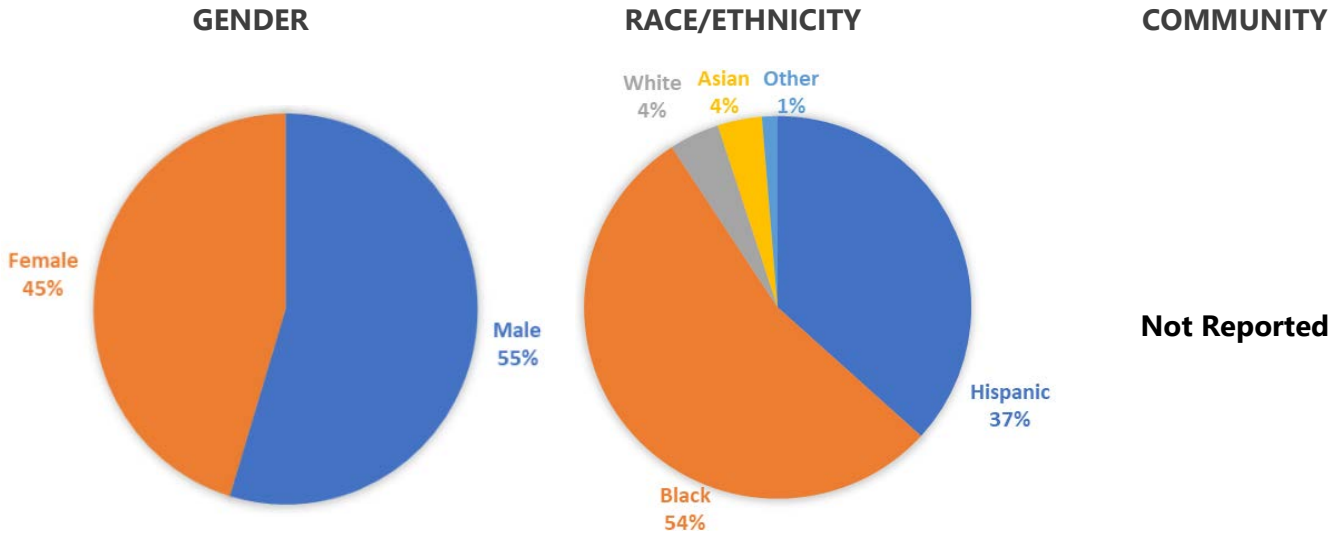
For More Information

Evaluation Reports	Additional Reports
Interim Evaluation Report (Full Report) (MDRC, June 2016) ²	Executive Summary: Interim Evaluation Report (MDRC, June 2016)
Interim Evaluation Report (ERIC) (MDRC, June 2016)	Press Release: Interim Evaluation Report (MDRC, June 2016)
	Analytical Brief: Interim Evaluation Report (MDRC, June 2016)
	FAQs (MDRC)
	Highlights: Overall Findings (MDRC, June 2016)
	Highlights: Early-Warning Indicators (MDRC, June 2016)
	Highlights: Chronic Absenteeism (MDRC, June 2016)
	Laying Tracks to Graduation (MDRC, August 2014)
	Moving Down the Track (MDRC, May 2015)

² The information and data for this result summary was collected from the most recent report as of 01/22/2020: MDRC. (2016, June). *Addressing early warning indicators: Interim impact findings from the Investing in Innovation (i3) evaluation of Diplomas Now*. Retrieved from http://diplomasnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/DiplomasNow-3rd-2016_2.pdf

Appendix A: Students Served by the Project³

GRADE(S)													
PK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12



HIGH-NEED STUDENTSⁱ

Free/Reduced-Price Lunch	English Learners	Students with Disabilities
89.9	18%	19.2%

³These data reflect the entire student population served by the intervention, not just the evaluation sample used in the impact study.

Appendix B: Impact Evaluation Methodology⁴

RESEARCH DESIGN:

Design:	Randomized Controlled Trial
Approach:	Thirty-two out of 62 participating schools were initially randomly assigned to receive Diplomas Now. The final sample included 58 schools, of which 29 received the intervention.
Study Length:	Two years

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS: SECOND COHORT

Study Setting	Sixty-two schools drawn from 11 large urban school districts across the U.S.
Final Sample Sizes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Intervention Group</i>: 14 middle schools and 15 high schools ▪ <i>Comparison Group</i>: 15 middle schools and 14 high schools
Intervention Group Characteristics:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Free/reduced-priced lunch: 89.9% ▪ Black: 54.0% ▪ Hispanic: 36.7% ▪ Asian: 3.7% ▪ White: 4.2% ▪ Other: 1.3% ▪ Male: 54.7% ▪ English language learners: 18.0% ▪ Special education status: 19.2%
Comparison Group Characteristics:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Free/reduced-priced lunch: 89.1% ▪ Black: 61.7% ▪ Hispanic: 27.6% ▪ Asian: 4.9% ▪ White: 4.6% ▪ Other: 1.2% ▪ Male: 54.3% ▪ English language learners: 17.3% ▪ Special education status: 17.1%
Data Sources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student records: Enrollment, attendance, suspensions, and course grades ▪ Surveys: Administrators, students, and teachers

⁴ These data reflect only the evaluation sample in the impact study, not the entire population served.

Key Measures:

- Attendance (Percentage of enrolled days attended)
- Behavior (Number and percentage of enrolled days suspended or expelled)
- Course performance (Passing grades in ELA, math, social science, and science courses)
- Stability Threshold: Attended over 90% of days enrolled; were never suspended or expelled; did not fail any math, ELA, social studies, or science courses
- No Early-Warning Indicators: Attended over 85% of days enrolled; suspended or expelled for fewer than three days; did not fail any math or ELA courses

Appendix C: Quality of the Evidence

Although an evaluation may not have been reviewed by the time of publication for this summary, it is possible that the study will be reviewed at a later date. Please visit the websites found in the footnotes on this page to check for updates.

WHAT WORKS CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW⁵

STUDY	RATING
Not reviewed as of 01/22/2020	N/A

EVIDENCE FOR ESSA REVIEW⁶

STUDY	RATING
Not reviewed as of 01/22/2020	N/A

NATIONAL CENTER ON INTENSIVE INTERVENTIONS REVIEW⁷

STUDY	RATING
Not reviewed as of 01/22/2020	N/A

⁵ <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/FWW>

⁶ <https://www.evidenceforessa.org/>

⁷ <https://intensiveintervention.org/>

The [*Investing in Innovation Fund \(i3\)*](#), established under section 14007 of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, is a Federal discretionary grant program at the U.S. Department of Education within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE). i3 grants help schools and local education agencies work in partnership with the private sector and the philanthropic community to develop and expand innovative practices that improve student achievement or student growth, close achievement gaps, decrease dropout rates, increase high school graduation rates, and/or increase college enrollment and completion rates for high-need students.

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ⁱ "High-need student" refers to a student at risk of academic failure or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, such as students who are living in poverty, attend high-minority schools, are far below grade level, who have left school before receiving a regular high school diploma, at risk of not graduating with a diploma on time, who are homeless, in foster care, have been incarcerated, have disabilities, or who are English learners. For more information see: [*Applications for New Awards; Investing in Innovation Fund-Development Grants, 81 FR 24070 \(April 25, 2016\)*](#).