

## **Diplomas Now Helps Prevent Dropouts**

Hopkins funds program, but has yet to instate it in Baltimore

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In collaboration with the City Year and Communities in Schools, the Hopkins Talent Development Team has implemented a program designed to prevent students from dropping out of high school, which has officially started this school year. The program, known as Diplomas Now, has been implemented in schools in Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, New Orleans and San Antonio.

However, although Diplomas Now is founded on Hopkins-based research, it is not being implemented in Baltimore schools at the moment.

"There isn't yet strong national service programs in Baltimore so we don't have the means to include Diplomas Now here," Robert Balfanz, a research scientist of the JHU Talent Development Team said.

According to Mary Maushard, the Director of Communications for the Talent Development Team, because the program is so new, the collaborators wanted to choose cities where there was easy access to their own resources and people.

"City Year is not in Baltimore, and we want places where we already had a presence," Maushard said.

Nevertheless, many Hopkins students found it incongruous that Diplomas Now has not yet set up in Baltimore, where the high school dropout rate is approximately 65 percent.

"I feel like this is definitely a place where [Diplomas Now] needs to be implemented," junior Zach Parkinson said. Senior Angela Lee also agreed with Parkinson.

"They should also implement Diplomas Now here if they're going to start the program because Baltimore has a really high dropout rate," she said.

The Johns Hopkins Center for Social Organization of Schools and the Philadelphia Education Fund researched together to collect data on high school dropout rates and causes in the U.S., which created the basis of the Diplomas Now program.

The research showed that up to 75 percent of high school dropouts can be identified between sixth to ninth grade, so Diplomas Now will be implemented not only in the high schools, but also in the feeder middle schools.

"Starting in sixth grade, they start to get disengaged," Balfanz said. "We're trying to find a model that has a constant nagging for hundreds of these kids daily."

In order to pinpoint these kids, the program is designed to target each individual student based on his or her needs.

The JHU Talent Development Team designed a model that can identify potential dropout students based on three aspects: poor attendance, poor behavior and course failure in English or mathematics.

Each school sends a team consisting of 10 to 15 core members that are sent by the City Year, one to two social workers that are sent by Communities in Schools and an on-site facilitator.

The team works together by first collecting data from teachers about each student and then comparing the data to a standard model to identify which students most need attention.

Then, based on the data, the team works to help along each individual so that no student will drop out of high school.

Hopkins students are open to this new concept of focusing on individuals to solve the problem.

"I think that it's important because each individual has a reason for staying in or dropping out," sophomore Ben McGuiggan said.

Many Hopkins students also believe that if Diplomas Now were to expand to Baltimore, it has the potential to help out a community in grave need of such a program.

"Since Hopkins is part of the Baltimore community, [Hopkins affiliates] should try to help Baltimore schools," McGuiggan said. Freshman Gaurav Dhar shares the same view as McGuiggan.

"We should always give back to the community we live in so it would make sense to put Diplomas Now here," Dhar said.

Balfanz does not disregard the idea of bringing Diplomas Now to Baltimore, but admits there are no plans in the immediate future for it.

"We're going to figure out how to eventually bring this to Baltimore," he said.

Maushard agreed that it is certainly plausible for Baltimore to eventually become included,

"Certainly [we] would entertain Baltimore if Baltimore [were] interested in having the program," she said.

The program is funded with a three year grant by the Pepsico Foundation. Although this is the first official year of implementation, the program had a pilot year last year with a school in Philadelphia.