

DIPLOMAS NOW EARLY IMPACT FINDINGS KEEPING AND PUTTING STUDENTS ON TRACK TO HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

Large randomized study finds it is possible in high-poverty secondary schools to greatly reduce the odds that a student will drop out.

Early impact results indicate that early warning and response systems are a key component of improving student outcomes in high-poverty schools.

KEY COMPONENTS OF DIPLOMAS NOW EARLY WARNING AND RESPONSE SYSTEM

- Teams of teachers who share common sets of students have weekly early warning indicator and response meetings
- ABCs – Attendance, Behavior, and Course Performance – used to track student progress
- Meetings facilitated initially by school transformation facilitator from Talent Development Secondary. Protocols employed to guide discussion and action and data displays that provide holistic look at student progress.
- If a student has an early warning indicator or is trending toward it, adults pool their knowledge of the student to consider the best course of action
- Intervention selected and an adult champion who has a good relationship with the student assigned to make sure it is implemented. Impact of interventions monitored, if not successful new intervention devised
- Students in need of academic and/or socio-emotional supports assigned a City Year corps member who works with them daily
- Students with serious out-of-school challenges supported by Communities In Schools site coordinator

KEY FINDING

Diplomas Now had a positive and statistically significant impact on increasing the number of 6th- and 9th- graders with No Early Warning Indicators

Why This Matters

Having high-needs students end the 6th and 9th grade with no early warning indicators is one of the highest leverage moves a school can make to dramatically increase the odds that students living in poverty will graduate from high school. Odds of graduating can shift from as low as 25% to as high as 75% if a student in a high-poverty environment completes the 6th and 9th grade with no early warning indicators.

The MDRC Diplomas Now Early Impact Study provides the first experimental evidence (demonstrated by a randomized

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control trial) across multiple school districts that it is not only possible to identify students who are on the path to dropping out in 6th and 9th grades, but to change their course and get them back on track to high school graduation. Moreover, the study shows that this can be consistently done across major urban school districts in the highest needs middle and high schools.

KEY FINDING

Early Impact report indicates that Diplomas Now use of an Early Warning and Response system helps keep proficient 5th-graders from falling off track in 6th grade, and students with no early warning indicators in 8th grade from falling off-track in 9th grade.

Why This Matters

The MDRC Early Impact report on Diplomas Now makes clear that in high-poverty environments, academic proficiency in 5th grade and completing 8th grade with good attendance, behavior, and course performance does not keep students from falling off-track to high school graduation during the transitions to middle and high school. Large numbers of these students developed early warning indicators during the 6th and 9th grades but fewer did so in Diplomas Now schools. This shows that close monitoring of all students during transition years, and rapid response to early indicators during 6th and 9th grades needs to be a core component of school improvement efforts in high-poverty schools.

KEY FINDING

The practices that existed to a greater extent in Diplomas Now schools than in the comparison schools help identify the central components of early warning and response systems -- teacher collaboration, use of data to guide interventions, instructional coaching, integrated student supports, targeted academic and behavioral interventions, and in-class behavioral supports. Diplomas Now students also reported higher rates of having a supportive relationship with an adult who was not their teacher.

Why This Matters

High-poverty secondary schools in our nation's major urban school districts can face incredible levels of student need. Prior to implementation, the 62 middle and high schools in the study, located in 11 major urban school districts, had on average, one-third of students being chronically absent, one-third being suspended, one-third failing a course, one-third over-age for grade, and only one-third of students proficient in mathematics or English. About 90 percent of their students were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch and the schools had higher than national averages of students with disabilities and English Language Learners.

This makes early warning and response systems an essential element of whole-school improvement efforts. Hence, it is important that the Diplomas Now MDRC studies are beginning to identify what the essential elements of these systems are. A forthcoming fourth report will dig deeper into this question.

This brief was written by Dr. Robert Balfanz, Co-Founder of Diplomas Now and Director of the Everyone Graduates Center Johns Hopkins University School of Education.

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