Diplomas Now had a positive and statistically significant impact on increasing the number of 6th- and 9th-grade students 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 control trial) that early warning and response systems are a key component of improving student outcomes in high-poverty schools.
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.

To learn more, visit www.diplomasnow.org or contact us at info@diplomasnow.org