

# DIPLOMAS NOW

## Frequently Asked Questions- Diplomas Now i3 Study

### What is Diplomas Now?

- Three national organizations — Talent Development Secondary, City Year, and Communities In Schools — partnered to form Diplomas Now in 2008
- Diplomas Now partners with the nation's most challenged middle and high schools to improve outcomes for students with the greatest needs, implementing whole-school improvement practices and an early warning system that identifies students who are off-track in attendance, behavior, and course performance in math and English then provides individualized academic and social-emotional support and case management to get them back on-track
- Diplomas Now was launched in 2008 by three organizations working in partnership: [Talent Development Secondary](#) at Johns Hopkins University, which provides curriculum and instruction support to teachers; [City Year](#), which provides high-impact student, classroom and school-wide academic and social-emotional interventions; and [Communities In Schools](#), which provides case management support to students with the highest needs
- Key practices in DN schools include the following: interdisciplinary teacher teams with shared students and common planning time; early warning indicator meetings with school and Diplomas Now staff to identify at-risk students and plan interventions for them; specialized support for struggling students, including academic tutoring, social-emotional development support, and case management; and job-embedded professional development and on-going coaching for teachers
- With the goal of a continuous system of support through secondary school, the model seeks to help more students graduate by improving attendance, behavior, and course performance in English and math during middle and high school
- In 2010, Diplomas Now won a \$30 million federal Investing in Innovation (i3) grant from the U.S. Department of Education to support the expansion of Diplomas Now and a rigorous random assignment evaluation of the Diplomas Now model, led by MDRC
- The PepsiCo Foundation, Diplomas Now's founding private sector investor, provided \$11 million to support the study

### Who are the major national funders of Diplomas Now?

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- AT&T, The Atlantic Philanthropies, Ballmer Group Philanthropy, Bank of America, Carnegie Corporation, Corporation for National and Community Service, Deloitte, Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Einhorn Family Charitable Trust, Ford Foundation, George Kaiser Family Foundation, Kenan Family Foundation, Laura and John Arnold Foundation, PepsiCo Foundation, Schusterman Family Foundation, U.S. Department of Education, Windsong Trust

## What is i3?

- The Investing in Innovation Fund, established in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), provides funding to support local educational agencies and nonprofit organizations to provide competitive grants to applicants with a record of improving student achievement and attainment in order to expand the implementation of, and investment in, innovative practices that are demonstrated to have an impact on improving student achievement or student growth, closing achievement gaps, decreasing dropout rates, increasing high school graduation rates, or increasing college enrollment and completion rates

## What is MDRC?

- MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and social policy research organization based in New York City and Oakland, CA
- Nationally-renowned, MDRC uses randomized control trials to measure the effects of social and educational policy initiatives

## What is a randomized control trial?

- A randomized control trial is a study that randomly assigns individuals or treatment groups (such as schools) to either an intervention group or to a control group in order to measure the effects of the intervention
- Randomized control trials enable one to evaluate whether the intervention itself, as opposed to other factors, causes the observed outcomes
- A randomized control trial is considered the “gold standard” because it creates circumstances under which differences that emerge between the two groups -- Diplomas Now schools and control (non-Diplomas Now schools) -- can be attributed to the efficacy of the intervention, Diplomas Now

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Is it difficult to achieve positive, statistically significant results in a randomized control trial?

- Yes, achieving this result is rare
- The Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy found that less than 1 in 10 (9%) randomized control trials included in the What Works Clearinghouse for education produced positive, meaningful impacts

What is the key finding in MDRC's latest report on Diplomas Now?

- Diplomas Now schools achieved a positive, statistically significant impact on increasing the percentage of sixth and ninth grade students with no early warning indicators – the outcome Diplomas Now was designed to achieve
- Prior research indicates that keeping students from having an early warning indicator can boost the odds of graduation from approximately 25 percent to 75 percent, which can dramatically change a young person's life trajectory from dropping out to graduating
- In middle schools, Diplomas Now achieved its strongest impact, reducing chronic absenteeism and the percentage of students exhibiting early warning indicators – this indicates that it is possible to reduce chronic absenteeism in the most challenging, underserved environments in the country

How and why is the randomized control trial being conducted?

- Conducted by respected research organization MDRC, the evaluation is a randomized control trial
- One set of high-poverty schools was randomly selected to implement Diplomas Now, and another set was randomly selected to implement the reforms of their choice
- Diplomas Now and MDRC recruited a large sample of 62 schools in 11 large urban school districts for the evaluation
- 32 schools were randomly assigned to implement Diplomas Now; the other 30 control (non-Diplomas Now) schools were to continue “business as usual”
- Both Diplomas Now and control (non-Diplomas Now) schools serve low-income students; 83% of students in the study are black or Hispanic, and 90% are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; more than 30% of the students in the study are overage, and 30% are chronically absent

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- The U.S. Department of Education and various private sector funders invested in the study because it is the largest randomized control trial on the impact of a secondary whole-school reform model and has the power to verify that not only can Diplomas Now identify students exhibiting early warning indicators, but also that Diplomas Now can consistently improve students' trajectories in the most challenged urban schools in the country

Which 11 school districts included in the study?

- Boston, Chicago, Columbus, Ohio, Detroit, Washington, D.C., East Baton Rouge, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City, Philadelphia, and San Antonio

Why weren't all Diplomas Now schools included in the study?

- Not all Diplomas Now schools were included in the randomized control trial
- Some Diplomas Now schools, such as those in Seattle, had already been partnering with Diplomas Now and were well-established as partners; other Diplomas Now schools, such as those in Tulsa and Denver, began partnering with Diplomas Now well after the randomized control trial was established

What do we know about the other reforms and interventions implemented in the control schools?

- The randomized control trial began during an era of intensive and widespread reform, and many of the control (non-Diplomas Now) schools implemented one or more school improvement models or interventions. Four of the control (non-Diplomas Now) schools were awarded School Improvement Grants that provided additional funding for school turnaround and transformation efforts, and another was taken over by a charter management organization. One control school used the University of Virginia as its school reform partner, plus Communities In Schools, and five of the control (non-Diplomas Now) schools partnered with City Year (4 high schools and 1 middle school). Three of the control (non-Diplomas Now) schools were reconfigured during the study, altering their catchment areas and/or grades in response to other school closings within their districts.

Why are some findings positive but not statistically significant?

- A positive result means that, on average, the Diplomas Now schools did better than the control schools

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- A statistically significant result means that if this comparison were conducted one hundred times, 9 out of 10 times, the results would be the same, which protects against findings resulting from measurement error or chance
- Whether a positive result is found statistically significant is largely determined by the size of the sample (in this case, the number of schools in the study) and the size of the difference in an outcome between the Diplomas Now schools and the control (non-Diplomas Now schools)
- The smaller the sample size (schools), the greater the difference in an outcome between the Diplomas Now and control (non-Diplomas Now) schools must be to reach statistical significance
- This report discusses several cases in which Diplomas Now achieved positive but not statistically significant impacts; because the overall sample size of 62 schools is modest, larger positive impacts are needed to reach statistical significance
- Sample size becomes most challenging in this report when the sample is cut in half to look at separate impacts at the middle and high school levels; for these comparisons, the sample size becomes 30, not 62, and as a result, larger impacts are needed to be statistically significant at the middle or high school level than when all the Diplomas Now and control (non-Diplomas Now) schools are combined

Why are the findings “better” for middle schools than high schools?

- In Diplomas Now high schools, many students begin ninth grade with multiple early warning indicators and likely require more years of support to be fully on-track to graduation
- Like the Diplomas Now schools, the control (non-Diplomas Now) schools, particularly the high schools, also improved, so the difference between the Diplomas Now and control (non-Diplomas Now) high schools was not as large as the difference between the Diplomas Now and control (non-Diplomas Now) middle schools

Why does the report include overall results but not city- or school-level results?

- In each participating school district, the number of middle or high schools involved in the study typically ranged from four to six, too small of a sample size to generate reliable findings at the individual district level, let alone at the individual school level

Will the randomized control trial continue after this report?

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- The study will continue, with the final year of implementation and data collection in schools taking place in school year 2016-17 in the Cohort 2 high schools
- All middle schools have four years of implementation and data collection as part of the study, and all high schools have five years, allowing study of impact of Diplomas Now on two full cohorts of students in each school
- MDRC is planning a fourth report, to be released in 2018, analyzing connections between implementation and impact data, and a fifth and final report in 2019, which will look at the primary outcomes of Diplomas Now: increased high school graduation rates and greater success in the 9th grade for middle-school students
- The fifth and final report will also discuss student outcomes in the sixth and ninth-grade, after the model has been implemented in a school for four years, which is the timeframe in which prior research shows the full impacts of whole-school improvement being most likely to be achieved

What does this study mean for the future of Diplomas Now? How will Diplomas Now use these findings? Will the Diplomas Now partners stay together and expand to more schools and cities?

- This study validates Diplomas Now's ability to make a difference in helping schools to implement whole-school reforms while not leaving the most vulnerable students behind
- Diplomas Now plans to use the "strong evidence" from this study to partner with more schools and to support more students as the new federal education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act, requires states and districts to use programs backed by "strong evidence" to qualify for federal Title I funding directed at improving low-performing schools
- The results demonstrate that the human capital provided by AmeriCorps is a critical element to reducing early warning indicators, providing capacity for more positive relationships with students and additional student supports at scale, including academically focused after school programs
- Diplomas Now is also using the findings from the study to continually improve its model and approach, focusing more on working with school districts to establish feeder patterns, with Diplomas Now middle grade schools sending students to Diplomas Now high schools

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