Destination: Graduation Program: 2010-11

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At-a-Glance

Destination: Graduation was a community funded program coordinated by The United Way of Metropolitan Dallas (UWMD) that was established to help mitigate dropping out of high school. The program started in 2005-06 at W.W. Samuell High School. In 2006-07, it expanded to two more high schools – J.F. Kimball and Thomas Jefferson. In 2010-11, the program operated in these three high schools and targeted students who were at a higher risk of dropping out. Destination: Graduation’s framework was a model for student retention based upon best practices by the National Dropout Prevention Center. The 2005-06 through 2010-11 school years comprised the pilot phase for Destination: Graduation.

The aim of Destination: Graduation was to increase high school graduation rates through parental involvement, college preparation, and mentoring. These three strategies were customized for each school to meet the particular needs of that campus, equipping students with college readiness tools that could help them make a smooth transition from high school to college. Students and parents were selected to participate in the program by counselors or other school personnel, and could opt into one, two, or all three of these component strategies, which were implemented by community non-profit organizations.

Program Components

The parental involvement program catered to both English and Spanish speaking parents, equipping them with an increased knowledge of the college preparation process and what they could do to prepare their students for admission. Parental involvement at Thomas Jefferson and Samuell High Schools were implemented in Spanish by Dallas Concilio and in English by The Urban League of Greater Dallas. At Kimball, parental involvement was facilitated by Dallas Concilio and Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship.

The Destination: Graduation mentoring program matched students with adults to spend quality time, fostering their academic growth and achievement. Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the largest youth mentoring organization in the nation, was responsible for student mentoring at Thomas Jefferson and Kimball, while The Urban League of Greater Dallas provided mentoring programs at Samuell.

College preparation trained students on entrance exam preparation and general study skills, applying for college, filling out financial aid applications, and applying for scholarships. College preparation was managed by Princeton Review at all three schools.

Student Demographics

A total of 247 of the 1,886 students at Samuell participated in Destination: Graduation. At Kimball, 249 of 1,232 participated, and at Jefferson, 189 students of 1,269 participated. Overall, 697 Dallas ISD students took part in Destination: Graduation programs, representing almost 16 percent of the students in eligible schools.

The majority of Destination: Graduation students were Hispanic (69.4%). African American students made up almost 29 percent, and two percent of students in the program were white or of other ethnicity. Participants were split evenly between genders, with 49 percent of the students being female and 51 percent male. A total of 237 Destination: Graduation students were limited English proficient (34.0%). Special education students made up eight percent of the program. Most Destination: Graduation students were economically disadvantaged: 595 of the program’s 697 students, or 85.5 percent, belonged to this category.

Attendance

Attendance was higher for students in Destination: Graduation relative to their non-participant classmates. The average percent attendance for non-participants was 92 percent. Destination: Graduation students’ attendance rate was 94 percent. The largest attendance difference was for students participating in the parental involvement component; this group showed a three percentage point higher attendance rate than non-participant students at each school.

College Entrance Exams

Students participating in the program took the Preliminary SAT, SAT, and ACT entrance exams at a higher rate than non-participants across all grade levels. Average scores for students in grades nine still fell behind overall district averages, but 10th, 11th, and 12th graders exceeded them.

Advanced Placement
Destination: Graduation students enrolled in Pre-Advanced Placement (Pre-AP) and Advanced Placement (AP) classes at higher rates than non-participant students at their schools. In past years, both the Destination: Graduation students and non-participant students at Samuell, Kimball, and Jefferson enrolled at lower rates than the district average. This has traditionally illustrated an opportunity for growth in the program’s college preparatory strategy, because while interest in college entrance exams was growing among Destination: Graduation students, most were still not gaining exposure to college level curricula through Advanced Placement. 2010-11 marks the first year that Destination: Graduation students enrolled at a higher rate than the district average, and is a sign of success in this goal area.

Grade Point Average

The average GPA for Destination: Graduation ninth, 10th, and 11th graders was higher than for non-participants (2.3 points higher at ninth grade, almost 1 point higher at 10th, and 2.3 points higher at 11th). By the 12th grade, the increase was less pronounced (less than a point) but still visible. As a district population, 12th graders had higher averages than students in lower grades.

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)

A higher percentage of Destination: Graduation students met standards in every subject area at grades 10, 11, and 12, compared to non-participant students.

Graduation

The average percent graduated for Destination: Graduation seniors was over 14 percentage points higher than for non-participants in the same schools. The overall district average percent graduated (88.0%) was almost two and a half percentage points lower than that of Destination: Graduation students (90.5%). Table 1 presents graduation for both groups by school.

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**Table 1**
Graduation by Program Participation and Grade

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Samuell</th>
<th>Kimball</th>
<th>Jefferson</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D:G</td>
<td>Non-D:G</td>
<td>D:G</td>
<td>Non-D:G</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>87.3%</td>
<td>71.3%</td>
<td>94.6%</td>
<td>76.9%</td>
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Summary and Recommendations

The relationship between program participation and student attendance was positive, especially in the parent involvement component. In addition, program participation was positively associated with higher rates of college entrance exam attempts, higher entrance exam scores, and higher rates of enrollment in college preparatory courses. The grade point averages (GPA) for students participating in Destination: Graduation were higher than for students at the same schools who did not participate. The goal of Destination: Graduation was to make a positive impact on the graduation rates of students at high schools in North Texas. In 2010-11, the average percent of Destination: Graduation students graduated was over 14 percentage points higher than that of non-participants.

Overall, the results of the Destination: Graduation program were quite positive. Some recommendations for the Destination: Graduation program were to consider expanding the emphasis of the college preparation component, to maintain thorough documentation to determine student participation and progress, and to consider expansion of the program.

Additional information may be obtained by consulting EA11-250-2, which can be found at www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/.