Destination: Graduation Program: 2011-12

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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, and operated at W.W. Samuell, J. F. Kimball, and Thomas Jefferson from 2006-07 to 2010-11. In 2011-12, the program continued at W. W. Samuell and Thomas Jefferson, added Lincoln High School and discontinued at Kimball. The program 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 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 could opt into one, two, or all three of these components, which were implemented by community non-profit organizations.

Program Components

Destination: Graduation’s parental involvement program catered to both English and Spanish speaking parents, teaching them about the college preparation process and what they could do to prepare their students for admission. Parents completed college admission applications and financial aid applications with their children. The program also encouraged parents to increase their involvement in the campus Parent Teacher Associations and other school activities. Dallas Concilio implemented the parent involvement programs at all three schools.

The Destination: Graduation mentoring program matched students with adults to spend quality time fostering their academic growth and achievement. Communities in Schools worked with each campus to identify student needs and develop intervention services that included case management, student leadership groups, discussion groups addressing gender-specific issues, mentoring, and other services as requested by principals to best serve each school’s unique population and needs.

The focus of the college preparation component was to motivate and prepare students for graduation and college opportunities. College preparation taught students about entrance exam preparation and general study skills. It also aided students in applying for college, filling out financial aid applications, and applying for scholarships. College preparation was managed by Princeton Review at Samuell and Lincoln. Jefferson did not have a structured college preparation program in 2011-12, because the school chose to focus its resources instead on parental involvement and mentoring strategies.

Student Demographics

A total of 337 of the 1,722 students at Samuell participated in Destination: Graduation. At Lincoln, 189 of 672 participated, and at Jefferson, 214 students of 1,345 participated. Overall, 766 Dallas ISD students took part in Destination: Graduation programs.

The majority of Destination: Graduation students were Hispanic (65.0%). African-American students made up 33 percent of participants, and two percent of students in the program were of other ethnicities. Slightly more participants were female than male this year, with almost 52 percent of students being female and roughly 48 percent male. A total of 293 Destination: Graduation students were LEP students (38.3%). Special education students made up one-tenth of the program. Most Destination: Graduation students were economically disadvantaged: 704 of the program’s 766 students, or 90.7 percent.

Attendance

Attendance was slightly higher for students in Destination: Graduation relative to their non-participant classmates. Overall, Destination: Graduation students’ attendance rate was 92.3 percent, compared with 91.7 percent attendance for non-participant students at the same schools. The largest attendance difference was for students with parents participating in the parental involvement component. It was expected that the involvement of an adult family member in school activities would have positive impact on students’ school attendance. Accordingly, this group showed a greater than two percentage point attendance increase over non-participant students at the same schools.

College Entrance Exams
Students participating in the program took the entrance exams at a higher rate than non participants across all grade levels. Although Jefferson did not implement a college preparation program at their school, students at the campus still attempted college entrance exams at a higher rate than non-D:G students, especially those participating in parental involvement – a program which focused on educating parents about the college application and admissions process.

**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 and Jefferson enrolled at lower rates than the district average. 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. 2011-12 marks the second consecutive year that Destination: Graduation seniors enrolled at a higher rate than the district average.

**Grade Point Average**

The average GPA for Destination: Graduation students was not statistically different than for non-participants in any grade. The overall GPA for students at Destination: Graduation campuses was lower than the district average, regardless of program participation.

**Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)**

A higher percentage of Destination: Graduation students met standards in reading at all grades, as compared to non-participant students at Destination: Graduation schools. In math and science, Destination: Graduation students did not generally perform as well as non-participants, and in social studies, scores were comparable between the two groups.

**Graduation**

The average percent graduated for Destination: Graduation seniors was 11 percentage points higher than for non-participants in the same schools. The overall district average percent graduated (88.4%) was almost two percentage points lower than that of Destination: Graduation students (90.3%). Table 1 presents graduation for both groups by school.

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<th>Samuell</th>
<th>Lincoln</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D:G</td>
<td>Non-D:G</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>90.7%</td>
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**Summary and Recommendations**

Attendance rates were slightly higher for students in Destination: Graduation relative to their non-participating classmates, with the most marked difference in attendance for students with parents participating in the parental involvement component. Students participating in the program took college entrance exams at a higher rate than non-participants at Destination: Graduation schools across all grade levels. The average GPA for Destination: Graduation students was not statistically different than for non-participants in any grade. A higher percentage of Destination: Graduation students met standards in reading at all grades, as compared to non-participant students at Destination: Graduation schools. In math and science, Destination: Graduation students did not generally perform as well as non-participants, and in social studies, scores were comparable between the two groups. The major goal of Destination: Graduation was to increase high school graduation rates, and participating seniors graduated at a rate 11 percentage points higher than non-participants.

The following are recommendations for the Destination: Graduation program:

1. Continue to offer rich parental involvement opportunities, and explore ways to expand the existing program. Continue expanding the emphasis of college preparation to include not only entrance exams and applying for admissions and financial aid, but also to encourage students to attempt college level curricula early and often. Pre-AP and AP high school classes and community college classes may provide opportunities for valuable exposure.

   The fundamental strategies of the program are sound, and participating students consistently show improvement. Continue expanding Destination: Graduation to additional campuses and expanding the
number of students at each campus who are able to participate.

Additional information may be obtained by consulting EA12-250-2, which can be found at http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/15252.