Destination: Graduation Program: 2008-09

C. Elizabeth Jones, B.S.  
EA09-250-4

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 2008-09, 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 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 to 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 or all three of these components.

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 was responsible for student mentoring at all three high schools.

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 303 of the 1,869 students at Samuell participated in Destination: Graduation. At Kimball, 160 of 1,295 participated, and at Jefferson, 249 students of 1,179 participated. Overall, 712 Dallas ISD students took part in Destination: Graduation programs, representing 16.4% of the students in eligible schools.

The majority of Destination: Graduation students were Hispanic (67.8%), African American students made up 31.1%, and less than one percent of students in the program were white or of other ethnicity. Participants were split evenly between genders, with 49.9% of the students being female and 50.1% male. A total of 150 Destination: Graduation students were limited English proficient (21%). Special education students made up 7.7% of the program. Most Destination: Graduation students were economically disadvantaged: 602 of the program’s 712 students, or 84.5%, belonged to this category.

Attendance

Attendance increased for students in Destination: Graduation relative to their non-participant classmates. The average percent attendance for the district’s 44,472 high school students was 92%. Destination: Graduation students’ attendance rate was 95%.

The most marked increase in attendance was for students participating in the parental involvement component; this group showed a 4% higher attendance rate than non-participant students at each school.

College Entrance Exams

Students participating in the program took the Preliminary SAT and SAT entrance exams at a higher rate than non-participants across all grade levels. Students in grades nine and 11 still fell behind overall district averages, but 10th and 12th graders exceeded them. This may have been due to the Preliminary SAT’s dual purpose as a National Merit Scholarship qualifying exam for 10th graders, and 12th graders attempting the SAT for college application during the senior year. Further, Destination: Graduation students typically scored higher on these exams than non-participants, but still below the district average.
Advanced Placement

Destination: Graduation students enrolled in Pre-Advanced Placement (Pre-AP) and Advanced Placement (AP) classes at roughly the same rate as the district average, which included magnet schools. The non-program students at Samuell, Kimball, and Jefferson enrolled at lower rates than either program students or the district average, illustrating the lower interest in college preparatory courses that may have compelled these campuses to partner with Destination: Graduation.

Grade Point Average

The average grade point average (GPA) for Destination: Graduation ninth graders and 10th graders was higher than for non-participants (3.7 points higher at ninth grade and 1.4 points higher at 10th.)

Destination: Graduation juniors averaged more than a half point better than their non-participant classmates across the district, but seniors made virtually no gain. The average GPA for Destination: Graduation seniors was higher at Samuell, however, by roughly the same amount as was seen in district 11th graders. This cohort had the benefit of the Destination: Graduation program at their campus all four years of high school, as they were freshmen when the program began in 2005-06.

Promotion and Graduation Rates

The average promotion rate for Destination: Graduation students was higher than for non-participants at all grades, and exceeded 90% in all cases. The district average promotion rate was 86.1%. The average graduation rate for Destination: Graduation seniors was almost 15% higher than for non-participants. The district average graduation rate was similar to that of non-Destination: Graduation students, at 73.2%. Table 1 presents promotion and graduation rates for both groups by grade and school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Promotion Rates, by %</th>
<th>Graduation Rates, by %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samuell</td>
<td>Kimball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>70.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>87.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>87.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>73.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary and Recommendations

The 712 program participants were proportionally representative of the eligible students at the schools.

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. This reflected success in the program’s goal of preparing students to graduate ready for admission and success as college freshmen.

The grade point averages (GPA) for students participating in Destination: Graduation were higher than for students at the same schools who did not participate. Notably, seniors at Samuell who have been in the program all four years of high school maintained a higher GPA than seniors at either Kimball or Jefferson.

The goal of Destination: Graduation was to make a positive impact on the graduation rates of students at high schools in North Texas; the long term goal was that the graduation rate of Destination: Graduation students would be 20% higher than the graduation rate of non-Destination: Graduation students. In 2008-09, the graduation rate of Destination: Graduation students was almost 15% higher than that of non-participants.

Overall, the results of the Destination: Graduation 2008-09 program were quite positive. However, efforts still need to be made to promote the goals of the program, and to work toward bringing the students at these traditionally at-risk campuses up to the district averages.

Additional information may be obtained by consulting the Destination: Graduation Executive Summary Report, EA09-250-3, which can be found at [www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/](http://www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/).