

DIPLOMAS NOW

Using Early Warning Indicators: HOW THE DIPLOMAS NOW PARTNERSHIP HELPS TO KEEP STUDENTS IN SCHOOL AND ON TRACK TO GRADUATION IN HIGH-NEED SCHOOLS

For the past decade, Diplomas Now has collaborated with our nation's most challenged middle and high schools through a multi-year whole school improvement model designed to increase graduation rates and college readiness.

Diplomas Now founding partners each bring specialized, research-based resources that are informed by whole school improvement practices and an "early warning system" that identifies students who are off track in attendance, behavior and course performance. The model builds additional student and adult capacity in schools to help students get back on track to academic success and graduation.

Core components of the Diplomas Now model include:

- Professional development, instructional coaching and data and curriculum support for teachers, provided by **Talent Development Secondary at Johns Hopkins University**.
- Individual student, classroom and school-wide academic and social-emotional interventions, provided by trained **City Year** AmeriCorps members.
- Case management for the highest-need students, provided by **Communities In Schools**.

The model is based on research that found students who exhibit one or more "early warning indicators" (EWI's) of **low attendance, poor behavior** or **course failure in English or math** are exponentially more at risk for dropping out of high school.¹

Research shows that preventing one or more of these warning signs makes it three times more likely that a student will graduate, dramatically improving his or her lifetime trajectory.²

In 2010, Diplomas Now received a \$30 million Investing in Innovation grant from the U.S. Department of Education to implement the program in schools across the country and to support one of the largest-ever randomized control trials of secondary schools – 62 schools from 11 large urban districts.³ The PepsiCo Foundation,

Diplomas Now's founding private sector investor, provided \$11 million to support the study.

Diplomas Now schools implemented and sustained different practices than the comparison schools in the randomized control trial, including:

- Teachers using data to drive instruction and target struggling students, collaborating more and receiving support from instructional coaches.
- Students receiving coordinated academic and non-academic services, including targeted math and English interventions and in-class behavioral supports.

Findings from a major randomized control study released in June 2016, which looked at results from one year of impacts from a multi-year intervention, validates Diplomas Now's impact on reducing students' early warning indicators – the key metric Diplomas Now was designed to improve.

These early findings have provided strong evidence that it is possible to not only identify students at risk for dropping out of school but to change their trajectory during key transition years and get them back on track to high school graduation in our nation's highest-need schools by reducing or preventing early warning indicators.⁴



FOUR KEY FINDINGS:

1 It is possible to reduce the number of students who are off track on attendance, behavior and course performance and on the path to dropping out, thereby changing their course and getting these students back on track to high school graduation.⁵

- The 2016 report found that Diplomas Now has a positive, statistically significant impact⁶ on increasing the percentage of sixth and ninth graders exhibiting no early warning indicators.
- Diplomas Now is succeeding in reducing the number of students at risk for dropping out across entire schools, suggesting a positive whole school effect that goes beyond at-risk students receiving one-on-one interventions.

2 It is possible to reduce chronic absenteeism in our nation's highest-need middle schools, defined as missing more than 10 percent of school days in a single academic year.

- The 2016 report found that Diplomas Now had a positive, statistically significant impact on reducing early warning indicators in middle schools, particularly on reducing chronic absenteeism, increasing the number of middle school students who attended over 90 percent of enrolled days.

3 It is possible to help students in high-need schools who are on track in sixth and ninth grade stay on track to high school graduation.⁷

- In high-need environments, even academically prepared students are at risk of falling off track during the sixth and ninth grades⁸; emerging evidence indicates Diplomas Now helps these students stay on track.

4 More students report having positive relationships with adults who are not teachers.

- Students at Diplomas Now schools were more likely to report a positive relationship with an adult at school who was not a teacher.⁹ They also reported participating in more academically-focused afterschool activities than did their peers at schools without Diplomas Now.
- This finding bolsters previous research findings that students stay in school, are more engaged and report they perform better academically when they feel connected to at least one adult who is part of their educational experience.¹⁰

TAKEAWAYS:

Ensuring that students end the key transition years of sixth and ninth grades without any early warning indicators can be an effective strategy for schools to significantly increase the odds that a student in a high-need community will graduate from high school.



Findings from the randomized control trial of Diplomas Now are contributing to a growing evidence base about interventions that work in struggling schools to dramatically improve individual student and whole school outcomes.

National service, particularly AmeriCorps, has a major role to play in helping to support students most at risk for dropping out of school, forming developmental relationships with students, and delivering research-based academic and social-emotional support designed to help students stay in school and graduate, prepared for college and career.

ENDNOTES:

1. Balfanz, R. & Fox, J. (Oct. 2011). Early Warning Systems – Foundational Research and Lessons from the Field. Retrieved from <https://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/1110EARLYDROPBALFANZ.PDF>
2. Neild, R.C., Balfanz, R., & Herzog, L. (2007). An Early Warning System. *Educational Leadership*, 65(2), 28-33. Retrieved from http://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Early_Warning_System_Neild_Balfanz_Herzog.pdf pp. 2-3.
3. Boston, Chicago, Columbus, Detroit, East Baton Rouge, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City, Philadelphia, San Antonio, and Washington D.C., N=14,950 students
4. MDRC. (2016). Addressing Early Warning Indicators: Interim Impact Findings from the Investing in Innovation (i3) Evaluation of Diplomas Now. Retrieved from <http://www.mdrc.org/publication/addressing-early-warning-indicators>
5. Diplomas Now. (2016). Diplomas Now Brief: i3 Early Impact Report: Analysis and Implications. Retrieved from [https://www.cityyear.org/sites/default/files/Diplomas Now Brief - i3 Early Impact Report final.pdf](https://www.cityyear.org/sites/default/files/Diplomas%20Now%20Brief%20-%20i3%20Early%20Impact%20Report%20final.pdf)
6. Fewer than 1 in 10 education studies report positive, meaningful results. Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy, "Randomized Controlled Trials Commissioned by the Institute of Education Sciences Since 2002: How Many Found Positive Versus Weak or No Effects," July 2013.
7. Diplomas Now. (2016).
8. Looking Forward to High School and College: Middle Grade Indicators of Readiness in Chicago Public Schools. (2014). The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. Retrieved from: [https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Middle Grades Report.pdf](https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Middle%20Grades%20Report.pdf)
9. Addressing Early Warning Indicators: Interim Impact Findings from the Investing in Innovation (i3) Evaluation of Diplomas Now. (2016). MDRC. Retrieved from: http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/Addressing_early_warning_indicators_ES.pdf
10. Johns Hopkins Urban Health Institute. Best Practices for Effective Schools. Retrieved from http://urbanhealth.jhu.edu/media/best_practices/effective_schools.pdf

DIPLOMAS NOW FOUNDING PARTNERS



DIPLOMAS NOW FOUNDING INVESTOR

