

Maryland's Tomorrow

A Summary of:

MARYLAND'S TOMORROW HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM OUTCOME EVALUATION:

Cohorts I, II, and III, February 1995 Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Planning, Results, and Information Management

MARYLAND'S TOMORROW: Lessons

Learned, July 1996, Institute for Policy Studies, The Johns Hopkins University by Marion Pines, Laura Noffke and Ann von Lossberg

Overview

The Maryland's Tomorrow high school program (hereafter MT) is a large-scale, state-wide dropout prevention effort operating in 75 high schools across Maryland. Central goals of MT are dropout prevention and improved passing rates on the Maryland Functional Tests (hereafter MFT) for students who are more at-risk than the general school population. MT services begin the summer before ninth grade and continue year-round for five years, including summers and transition services for the year following graduation.

POPULATION

Ninth through 12th grade students in the State of Maryland who are "at-risk of dropping out of high school" (who are one year behind in mathematics or reading and/or were retained in grade at-least one year prior to 9th grade). MT serves approximately 7,500 students annually. In 1992-1993, MT students were 41.6 percent Caucasian, 54.5 percent African American, 3.9 percent Hispanic, American Indian and Asian/Pacific Islander, 57.7 percent male, and 42.3 percent female. (Demographics have remained roughly constant since 1992.)

Evidence of Effectiveness

The 1995 comparison group evaluation of MT by the Maryland State Department of Education examined the largest 27 of the 75 MT programs and found:

- ◆ MT students had higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates than comparison group students in more than half of the programs studied.
- ◆ In the first three cohorts, there was a 27 percent decline in the number of dropouts. These three cohorts produced 1,393 graduates. According to the comparison groups' performances, if MT services had not been provided, only 1,242 would have graduated.
- ◆ Performance on the Maryland Functional Tests improved in each of the three cohorts. The third cohort of MT students outperformed comparison students in 100 percent of the 27 evaluated schools. The percentage of MT participants passing all the Maryland Functional Tests also increased for each of three cohorts (Cohort I: 78 vs. 62 percent of comparison students; Cohort II: 86 percent; Cohort III: 97 percent). Test scores also went up as MT participants progressed from the 9th to 11th grades.

- ◆ 9th and 10th grade GPAs were higher for MT participants than comparison group students in a majority of schools in all three cohorts. In Cohorts I and II, however, 11th and 12th grade GPAs were lower for MT participants than for comparison group students in over half of the schools.

MT programs are held strictly accountable through a Performance Management System that sets expectations for annual improvements in MFT pass rates, dropout rates, attendance, and credits earned. Annual performance outcomes are measured and an annual “report card” is issued for each of 75 programs indicating three years of trend data. MT student performance in each program is compared to all students in the school that hosts that MT program.

Based on annual MT performance data statewide:

- ◆ The school dropout rate of MT participants went down each year over a four-year period from a high of 6.52 percent in 1992-93 to 4.70 percent in 1995-96. (This brings the dropout rate for MT’s at-risk participants close to the state dropout rate of 4.58 percent for all students).

MT costs approximately \$1,200 per student per year of state and Job Training Partnership Act (hereafter JTPA) education set-aside funds. MT is funded primarily by the State of Maryland, with a commitment of close to \$10 million a year, augmented by JTPA “8 percent funds” and local contributions. The funds go directly from the Maryland State Department of Education to the 12 Service Delivery Areas/Private Industry Councils which develop partnerships with the local school districts for program implementation.

Key Components

MT has moved from serving 100 summer students in one city (in 1985) to a year-round, state-wide dropout prevention/intervention strategy serving approximately 7,500 annually, for a period of five years. Students are involved in MT from the summer before entering ninth grade to the year following graduation from high school. MT programs serve from a few to over 300 students annually in each of 75 schools, in all 24 state jurisdictions. Some counties have small programs in every school and others have large programs in only a few of their schools.

Each MT program includes:

- ◆ case management, counseling and continued high level support
- ◆ intensive academic instruction during the summer and school year
- ◆ career guidance and exploration (career counseling and transition services for five years)
- ◆ summer activities, including subsidized and private employment, community service, college camps, trips, workshops, and creative arts competitions
- ◆ personal development
- ◆ skills development
- ◆ peer support
- ◆ adult mentors

“Dropout intervention works in Maryland. Hundreds of Maryland’s Tomorrow graduates who were previously slated for failure have come to lead productive lives beyond their greatest expectations.”

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Some of the most intensive MT programs operate as “school-within-a-school”-type programs with small MT classes and flexible schedules. Other sites may provide pull-out services, and many sites make use of home visits and intensive parent involvement.

Contributing Factors

Caring Adults

MT serves as a “safe haven” for students through caring staff who take a special interest in each student. This is especially important for 9th graders, who often feel fearful and isolated in a new school. These caring adults hold MT students responsible for their actions through a strict attendance and grade monitoring system to make sure students stay in school and on-track for graduation. Personalized follow-up, sometimes highly individualized and intensive, extends for a year after graduation.

Long-term, Continuous Services

MT works with students for five years, from the summer before 9th grade until a year after high school graduation. Summer services ensure year-round contact.

“The single most important component of success found across three Maryland’s Tomorrow programs (selected for in-depth analysis) was consistent, caring adults. ... Consistency ... is critical. At-risk students do not need to become attached to someone, only to have that person slip out of his life. This chaotic pattern too often mirrors the past and can be debilitating to the students.”

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Sound Implementation

MT program implementors are provided with a combination of flexibility (through self-assessment and technical assistance) and accountability (through the Performance Management System) which allows for quality implementation. The cooperation of faculty, administrators, and parents also contributes to sound implementation.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

The Maryland State Department of Education evaluation compared academic achievement and dropout outcomes for the first three cohorts of students in MT ('88/89, '89/90, '90/91) in 27 schools to a comparable group of students in the same schools. MT students were tracked from ninth grade through high school graduation. Data on comparison groups at each school were gathered from school records. Data on MT participants were provided by the MT MIS system managed by the Institute for Policy Studies at Johns Hopkins and the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulations.

EVALUATION FUNDING

Evaluation conducted and funded by Maryland State Department of Education. Descriptive report funded by Maryland State Department of Education.

GEOGRAPHIC AREAS

There are MT programs in 75 high schools across the State of Maryland, with a program in each of the 24 state jurisdictions.

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