

Talent Development

A Summary of:

THE TALENT DEVELOPMENT HIGH SCHOOL: Essential Components, September 1996, by Velma LaPoint, Will Jordan, James M. McPartland and Donna Penn Towns

THE TALENT DEVELOPMENT HIGH SCHOOL: Early Evidence of Impact on School Climate, Attendance, and Student Promotion, September 1996 by James M. McPartland, Nettie Legters, Will Jordan and Edward L. McDill Both evaluations by Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR) Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD and Howard University, Washington, D.C.

Overview

The Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (hereafter CRESPAR), a collaborative between Johns Hopkins and Howard Universities, created a model of educational reform called “Talent Development” (hereafter TD) which features a multiple “school-within-a-school” career academy structure. Each academy is organized around a demanding curriculum, high expectations for student achievement, and an environment conducive to learning. In a partnership with CRESPAR, Patterson High School in Baltimore, Maryland— slated for reconstitution due to poor performance—was the first site to implement the TD Model.

POPULATION

About 2000 students attend the TD high school studied, Patterson High School. Sixty percent of the students are African American; 30 percent are white (mostly ethnic, working class); and 10 percent are American Indian, Asian or Hispanic. In 1994, Patterson was designated by the state of Maryland as one of the two worst high schools in the state because of its chaotic environment, poor attendance, excessive student tardiness, student failure (in 1993-94, over 80 percent failed the 9th grade), and poor test performance (only about 1/4 of Patterson 9th grade students could pass a state math competency test that is supposed to be taken in 7th or 8th grade).

Evidence of Effectiveness

CRESPAR conducted an evaluation on TD at Patterson High School which compared school records of the high school students (all of whom were “participants” in this full-school reform initiative) from the 1994-95 school year to the 1995-96 school year and found:

- ♦ 9th grade attendance improved by 9.4 percentage points (from 65.6 to 75 percent)
- ♦ attendance school-wide went up 6.1 percentage points (from 71.6 to 77.7 percent)
- ♦ compared with eight other non-selective Baltimore high schools, Patterson moved from second worst in attendance to second best
- ♦ 9th grade promotion went from 47.3 to an expected 69.1 percent (based on first semester course grades)
- ♦ teachers’ perceptions of the school changed dramatically
 - the percent of 9th grade and upper grade teachers who thought the school environment was not conducive to student achievement went down (80 and 86.7 percent respectively in 1994-1995 to 27.5 and 4.5 percent in 1995-1996)
 - the percent of 9th grade and upper grade teachers who thought absenteeism was a major problem went down (96 and 97.8 percent respectively in 1994-1995 to 45.5 and 19 percent in 1995-1996)

- the percent of 9th grade and upper grade teachers who thought the school “seemed like a big family” went up (13 and 13.7 percent respectively in 1994-95 to 45.5 and 54.5 percent in 1995-1996)

The cost of restructuring the school was approximately \$25.00 per student or between one and two percent of the previous year’s total costs. This will vary up or down at other sites depending upon needs to redesign the building and for planning time and professional development.

Key Components

The first TD site, Patterson High School, was completely restructured both physically and socially and reorganized into five academies—one freshman development academy and four upperclass career-oriented academies—focused on fostering individual student talents. The major TD components at Patterson were:

- ♦ establishing a general preparatory academy in the 9th grade featuring interdisciplinary teacher teams responsible for a maximum of 150-180 students
- ♦ setting up career academies in the 10th-12th grades to provide a relevant focus for studies
- ♦ maintaining the same homeroom class and teacher grades 10-12
- ♦ revising the homeroom teacher role to include advising and counseling
- ♦ making each academy physically separate to create a smaller learning community (separate entrances and stairways; a maximum of 300-350 students in the upper grade career academies)

“The Talent Development Model provides a comprehensive package of specific high school changes for students placed at risk. It is based upon research on student motivation and teacher commitment. It can be reliably implemented with adaptations to meet local circumstances.”

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- ♦ establishing a common core with all courses at the college-preparatory level (separate program tracks for College Prep, General Studies, or Vocational-Business were eliminated)
- ♦ holding students to demanding standards to pass courses
- ♦ setting up a four-period day (instead of seven) so classes are more in-depth and students have fewer teachers
- ♦ bringing in employer advisory boards to help design relevant curriculum and provide internship opportunities

Contributing Factors

Caring Adults

The school-within-a-school framework meant that teachers could more easily get to know their students and form stronger relationships with them. Having four class periods in a day instead of seven reduced the number of teachers with whom a student interacted daily and fostered stronger relationships. The teacher’s role was changed from evaluator to coach, with examinations based on departmental standards, thus relieving teachers from student pressure to alter tests or grades. Finally, homeroom teachers took on counseling and advisory roles, helping students with both their academic and non-academic problems.

“These early results indicate that one of the worst high schools in an urban district, designated for reconstitution by the state, is well on its way to becoming a very good school in its first year as a Talent Development High School. The teachers and administrators of Patterson High School have been able to turn their school around in terms of the climate for learning. They have also significantly improved student attendance and the probabilities of student promotions and graduations.”

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School-within-a-School Framework

The separate Ninth Grade Success Academy and four upper grade Career Academies (Arts and Humanities, Business and

Finance, Sports Studies and Health/Wellness, and Transportation and Engineering Technology) were housed in their own parts of the building, with separate entrances and stairways. While the 9th grade academy was the largest,

students within the academy were divided into teams of no more than 150-170 students. The career academies were no larger than 300-350 students. This physical restructuring helped foster a more family-like feeling in school.

Emphasis on Attendance

When Patterson studied the causes behind its low student promotion rate, it found that poor attendance was the strongest predictor of course failure. To combat student absenteeism, teachers under the new system made a determined effort to monitor attendance problems at the start, making calls directly to the student whenever she or he did not attend class. Researchers noted that improvements to the overall school climate also increased attendance, as students felt safer and more nurtured. They expect continuing improvement in attendance as new teaching methods are implemented (use of technology, project-based learning, cooperative learning) to more fully engage students in learning.

Recovery

Students who fail in terms of attendance, grades, or promotion have an opportunity to come back. Students with five or more absences per quarter automatically receive a failing grade, but if they have perfect attendance for five days in a row they can erase an earlier absence from the record. Students also have the opportunity to retake a failed course at Summer School, "Saturday School," or "Credit

School" (an hour after the end of the regular school day). If students are not promoted, they can gain a mid-year promotion by earning the missing credits during the first 18-week term of the next year.

Modified Assessment Tools

Patterson's assessment tools recognized both achievement against standardized criteria and improvement against a student's own starting point. Achievement and improvement grades are combined (with achievement weighted twice as much as improvement) to arrive at a final grade.

Additional Services to Address a Range of Student Needs

The Patterson TD school incorporated a number of services: coaching classes, peer tutoring, and extra computer drill and practice. The school took note of students who were falling behind and placed them in smaller classes, or classes with longer periods. For the most demanding courses, students were scheduled in double periods. The school also provided help with personal problems through school social workers and mental health professionals. A full-time "professional health suite" was set up, and school staff regularly discussed health issues with the students. Finally, students with severe disciplinary problems were placed in the "Twilight School," which featured a smaller student/teacher ratio (10:1) and instruction in life coping skills so these students could eventually return to the regular school.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

Researchers compared outcomes at Patterson High School from the 1994-1995 school year with the 1995-1996 school year. To gauge outcomes, they used faculty surveys, student attendance rates, report card grades and course credits earned.

EVALUATION FUNDING

Both evaluations funded by Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.

GEOGRAPHIC AREAS

Patterson High School in Baltimore was the initial TD model. The TD model is in various stages of implementation in four other Baltimore schools and in Washington, D.C. Replication is planned in Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington, DC, and six southern states.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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