

Dare to Dream

A Summary of:

“Dare to Dream: Educational Guidance for Excellence” (1996) Lilly Endowment. By Jon Snyder, Gale Morrison and R.C. Smith.

Focus

- Early Childhood
- Primary School
- ✓ Middle School
- ✓ Secondary School
- Postsecondary
- Extended Learning

Overview

The “Dare to Dream” study is about school change aimed at higher achievement, greater postsecondary options and productive futures for all American children. It focuses on one cluster of such efforts, operating through three projects: Keeping the Options Open, Partners for Educational Excellence and the Indiana School Guidance and Counseling Leadership Project. All three initiatives were financed by foundations, and all embraced educational guidance as a fundamental function of the public schools, thereby creating an enhanced role for professional school counselors. The projects were implemented in 1990 in more than 50 schools across the nation. In these projects, counselors became spokespeople for students traditionally underserved in schools. The broad goal was to keep postsecondary options open for all students, not just historically high-achievers in college preparatory tracks.

POPULATION

Evaluators concentrated on 10 sites, processing 317 faculty and staff surveys, and 2,370 student surveys. The report includes case studies of 7 high schools and one middle school (see Geographic Location, below, for locations of schools) which successfully implemented (i.e. achieved the best results from) the counseling reforms. All the schools faced school-wide achievement challenges of one kind or another. At *Pike High School* none of the African American students were registered in Advanced Placement courses. *Elkhart Central High School* had a low percentage of its African American student body enrolling in college prep English. *Franklin Middle School* had a high percentage of “at-risk” students. *Indian Creek High School* had a low percentage of its rural students taking the PSAT and aspiring toward college. *Northside High School* had a low percentage of African American students in its “minimum rigorous curriculum.” *Pickens County High School* was located in an Appalachian community where only 37% of the adult population had graduated from high school. *Port St. Joe High School* had a 50% college-going rate. *Robert E. Lee High School* served a predominantly Latino population with low math achievement.

Key Findings

The schools were linked conceptually by their use of educational guidance as the lever for school change. After the schools offered enhanced guidance counseling, students accomplished the following:

- ◆ Pike High School increased registration in Advanced Placement courses from 16 students (0% African American) in 1991-92 to 249 students (19% African American) in 1993-94.
- ◆ Between 1994 and 1995, Robert E. Lee High School increased the number of minority students enrolled in pre-calculus from 61 students to 104 and doubled the enrollment in calculus from 52 to 104 (maintaining the prior passing rates in each).
- ◆ Elkhart Central High School increased the number of African American seniors enrolled in college prep English from 26% to 69% and raised the number of African American freshmen enrolled in college prep English from 50% to 84% between 1992 and 1995.
- ◆ Northside High School increased the percentage of African American males in its “minimum rigorous curriculum” from 16% to 42.8% between 1993 and 1995 and the percentage of African American females from 29.4% to 43.3% during the same two-year period.
- ◆ Pickens County High School increased the percentage of students attending four-year colleges from 31% to 53% and the percentage of students attending either four-year or two-year colleges from 42% to 74% between 1989 and 1995.
- ◆ Indian Creek High School increased PSAT taking from 28% in 1990 to 53% in 1994. The percentage of students committed to pursuing postsecondary education rose from 53% to 97% in the same time span.
- ◆ Port St. Joe High School raised its college-going rate from 50% in 1986 to 72% in 1994.
- ◆ Franklin Middle School increased the number of students taking freshmen algebra, upon entering high school, from 121 to 201 between 1990 and 1992.

Program Components

Funders of the “Dare to Dream” initiatives brought together teams of education stakeholders interested in reform at each site. These teams came up with site-specific strategic plans to strengthen counseling services for underserved student populations. First, teams were presented a statistical summary of the crisis in American public schooling, stemming from high student dropout rates and low student achievement, especially among minorities and kids from impoverished backgrounds. Second, teams compiled data on dropout rates and achievement gaps at their own schools. Third, teams devised ways to help low-achieving students find avenues to success in their schools. Fourth, teams created vision-to-action plans to foster change and the attitude that “all kids can learn.” Finally, the teams were charged with bringing their action plans to

“School change begins with the ethical commitment that all children – regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or economic background – can achieve educational goals beyond high school and construct a future of their own choosing.”

—Jon Snyder, et al., evaluators

fruition. As enacted, the Dare to Dream action plans facilitated the following changes:

- ◆ Guidance became school-wide instead of being confined to the office of the guidance counselor. Students were provided the direct information and encouragement to locate further information themselves, regarding possible future education.

School guidance counselors were identified as the linchpin for change, but educational guidance became part of the total touch of each school. Professional school counselors became the “orchestrators” of educational guidance.

- ♦ Curriculum shifts helped ensure that academic “tracks” were less rigid, but equally rigorous as before, and that students considered “at-risk” were mixed into classrooms with those who were not.
- ♦ Shared leadership between school administrators, teachers, staff, outside expert teams and the students themselves helped each group push for new opportunities.
- ♦ “College centers,” or other locations housing information about higher education, were installed in the schools.

Contributing Factors

Team Counseling

Working in teams “led to improved communication and eventually to greater possibilities of coordinating efforts around the strengths, interests and needs of children, rather than regulations or traditional role boundaries,” noted the evaluators. A typical team included a school’s principal, guidance counselors, teachers and parents, as well as local college and community representatives.

Broad Base of Support

District personnel, funding agencies, researchers, state boards of education and policymaking groups

had a role and a responsibility in each school’s change. Though the schools did the work themselves, these other groups created an environment where more localized leaders could develop and use the knowledge, skills and dispositions, onsite, to make a difference for children and young adults.

Student-Guided Change

Schools relied on students to guide the change. Program direction was based on the strengths, interests and needs of the learners.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

The case studies were not randomly chosen by the evaluators, but were selected because of quality, implementation and outcome results. Research for the case studies included school data, student “shadowing” days, and focus groups discussions, as well as interviews with students, participating faculty and non-participating faculty. Evaluators also conducted five surveys with students, teachers and administrators focusing on school demographics, student aspirations and barriers, faculty guidance responsibilities and strategies for change. Evaluators did not chart the changing total demographics for each school, which would have helped to contextualize the findings.

EVALUATION & PROGRAM FUNDING

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GEOGRAPHIC AREAS

Locations of schools were: Elkhart Central High School, northern Indiana; Franklin Middle School, Minneapolis, MN; Indian Creek High School, Trafalgar, IN; Northside High School, Fort Wayne, IN; Robert E. Lee High School, San Antonio, TX; Pickens County High School, Georgian Appalachians; Pike High School, Indianapolis, IN; Port St. Joe High School, Gulf County, FL.

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