



## DIPLOMA PLUS - SAMPLING OF OUTCOME AND IMPACT DATA from March, 2008 Report to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Diploma Plus (DP) was developed as a rigorous and relevant alternative for youth who have been underserved by the traditional education system. DP incorporates four essentials - *a performance-based system, a supportive school culture, a future focus, and effective supports* to engage students and significantly improve their educational outcomes and transitions to post-secondary education and careers.

As the Parthenon Group noted: “Diploma Plus’ *success at engaging at-risk youth and providing them with an education is proven*, especially in comparison with the historical performance of traditional schools that do not have Diploma Plus’ unique educational approach, strict performance targets, and support structures.”<sup>1</sup> As detailed in our Annual Reports, analysis of the Diploma Plus schools from 2004-07 shows positive impacts and outcomes for students.

### Demographics:

From 2004 to 2007:

- During this period, Diploma Plus was implemented in 23 small alternative high schools or community-based programs, serving an average of 3,260 students per year.
- 51% of the students were African-Americans, 31% were Latino(a)s, 13% were Caucasian, 2% were Asian/Pacific Islanders, .2% were Native Americans or Native Alaskans, and 3% were Multi-Racial or Other.
- 10% of the student population were English Language Learners (although two sites had over 66%).
- The portion of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch was 85%.
- 43% of the student body were females and 57% were males.
- The average rate of attendance for Diploma Plus students was 80%.
- Graduation and retention rates, while varying among schools, averaged 78% over one year (comparable NYC schools had 65% over one year)
- 83% of Diploma Plus teachers were certified (it was 97% by the current year, 2007-08).

### Improving Academic Performance

When compared over time, or compared to schools with a similar student population, DP schools demonstrate positive impact on achievement. As evidence, recent data that shows **statistical significance** includes:

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<sup>1</sup> The Parthenon Group, from analysis of outcomes of DP Schools as part of the Gates funded Diploma Plus Strategic and Business Plan, August 2006.

- In NYC, a higher percentage of DP Students who were eligible took the ELA and Math A Regents and a higher percentage of DP students passed each test; in the case of ELA in 2005 and 2006, this difference was statistically significant.
- There is evidence of significant *improvement* on the Regents over time. For example:
  - Students at Harlem Renaissance increased their passing rate on the English portion of the state exam from 58% in 2005-2006 to 100% in 2007-2008 with 87% of the students exceeding proficiency.
  - From 2005-2006 to 2007-2008 students at Harlem Renaissance showed a 21% increase in their passing rate on the Math portion of the state exam
- On the 2007-8 Rhode Island state assessment, students at E3 Academy in Providence did significantly better ( $p < .01$ ) than students at 10 of the 11 other schools in their district on the English portion. The only school that did better was Classical, the Providence Exam School that only admits 30% of applicants
- In Massachusetts, DP schools fairly consistently out perform comparable schools on the MCAS (state assessment). There is also evidence of significant improvement over time; As examples:
  - In 2006-2007 students at the Berkshire Arts and Technology High School (BArT) showed a significant increase,  $p < .01$ , in their passing rate on both the English Language Arts and Math portion of the state exam compared to the previous year. In ELA, BArT had a 94.4% passing rate and in math, 94%.
  - Students at Boston Adult Technical Academy showed a significant increase,  $p < .10$ , in their performance *each year from 2004 to 2007* on the both the English Language Arts and Math portion of the state exam

## Improving Graduation Rates and Post-Secondary Options

- Across all the East Coast DP sites, we had a graduation rate (from the Plus Phase) of 90.2%
- 82% of DP graduates across all sites were accepted into and planning to attend college (an equal number for 2 or 4 year schools)
- In the sites we were able to track students, 70% of DP graduates entered college within a year after graduation
- 75% of students earn a “C” or better in college level courses taken in the Plus Phase
- 87% of students report they are more interested in college after attending their DP school

## Improving Student Engagement and Career Preparation

- When compared to schools with a similar student population, DP schools tend to have higher attendance rates, retention rates, and passing rates on state tests.
- All DP students participate in career development activities throughout their years in DP
- Plus Phase students completed over 400 internships last year in career interest areas.

## Diploma Plus Students Value the Program

Based on an online survey completed by students at Diploma Plus schools in the fall of 2007:

- 92% of students feel academically successful in the Diploma Plus school
- Significantly more students (89%) feel that school is important for success in life,  $p < .001$
- Significantly more students feel their Diploma Plus school is preparing them to succeed in college,  $p < .10$
- 86% of students prefer DP to their old school
- 95% of students feel they are better prepared for adulthood in DP than in their former school
- Significantly more students feel they are being prepared for jobs in the future,  $p < .02$ .

This confirms earlier third-party evaluation<sup>2</sup> findings from a study completed in August 2005. There were a number of findings in that study, including the following sampling.

### *Target Population*

- Diploma Plus is serving its intended population – young people who face personal, educational, and economic challenges that make success in a traditional high school setting difficult.
- Most Diploma Plus students come from families with little history of post-secondary education. Only eighteen percent of students reported that a parent had completed a postsecondary degree, and only thirteen percent reported having a sibling who had graduated from college. Most students did not have family members with experience applying to or attending college.

### *Students' Experience of Diploma Plus*

- Across different kinds of Diploma Plus schools and programs, Diploma Plus provided students with positive experiences at school and the opportunities to enjoy a level of academic achievements that were higher than they reported achieving at their previous schools.
- Students were overwhelmingly positive about the Plus Phase experience. In particular, they appreciated the close personal attention from their advisor, found the senior projects fun and interesting, and strongly valued the opportunity to take college courses.
- Eighty-one percent of students taking college classes while in the Plus Phase of the program between 2002 and 2004 passed at least one course. Most (seventy-one percent) earned a “C” or better in at least one course.
- Students were overwhelmingly positive about the academic, career development, and youth development aspects of DP. Students reported that Diploma Plus:
  - improved their academic performance
  - engaged them in career planning
  - increased their interest and prepared them for college entry
  - addressed their individual academic needs
  - had given them leadership opportunities

Diploma Plus, when fully implemented, with retention rates at the target of 90%, is highly *cost effective*. The Parthenon Group concludes: DP’s “high performance standards represent a significant improvement over the outcomes of at-risk students in traditional high schools, or even in alternative high schools that do not have the support and high expectations of the Diploma Plus network. These high standards not only result in schools that have better outcomes but also provide greater leverage of the district’s dollar, so that a school district invests less money in generating a successful graduate from high school.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Brigham Nahas Research Associates, Diploma Plus Evaluation, Cambridge, Massachusetts (August 2005).

<sup>3</sup> The Parthenon Group, *ibid*, page 27