



Illinois State Board of Education

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Abstract

Target Audience

Diplomas Now is interested in partnering with secondary schools (6-8 or 9-12).

General Description of Supports Provided

Diplomas Now is the strategic collaboration of three nationally recognized organizations, each of which has a track record of success in positively impacting students' success: Talent Development Secondary of Johns Hopkins University, City Year and Communities In Schools.

Talent Development Secondary's (TDS) whole-school reform model boosts student achievement in struggling schools by creating small learning communities of interdisciplinary teacher teams using engaging, culturally and developmentally appropriate curricula created at TDS. This approach, combined with common planning time to review and act on students' current Early Warning Indicator (EWI) and achievement data, enables teachers and staff to provide appropriate and timely interventions to students. The program provides disadvantaged students the academic, social, and behavioral/emotional supports needed to improve attendance, behavior, and course performance, while preparing them for success in college and the world of work. In addition to direct supports given to students, TDS specifically offers teachers professional development and engaging curricula to help students reach their highest potential. Instructional facilitators in math, English, and school climate, along with in-school coaches, support and train teachers while building the capacity to sustain a culture of achievement.

City Year (CY) provides a cohort of eight or more young adults who work full time at the school to provide a number of critical tiered supports for students. The corps members act as near-peers to students, providing a model of success and a mentor that students see on a daily basis. The corps members work in classrooms, helping teachers differentiate instruction and provide push-in and pull-out tutoring that is directly aligned to curriculum. They monitor students' data closely, creating a focus list of students who need additional help in course performance, attendance or behavior. The team also creates student and family events that help build an engaging and welcoming culture and climate at the school, coordinating their activities with those of the teacher teams and administration.

Communities In Schools (CIS) provides a full-time, site-based Student Supports Manager at the school who provides direct student supports and brokers resources targeted to the school's needs. The Student Supports Manager works with CIS main office staff to locate and review a broad range of organizations that offer social, cultural and educational resources to schools. The manager works with

administrators and teachers to identify needs and opportunities in the school in order to match them with specific, vetted organizations. This manager also provides direct social-emotional supports to students individually and in small groups.

Each of the three partners individually has a powerful impact on student success, but DN brings the three together in a coordinated partnership that allows them to increase their impact greater than the sum of their parts. After the intensive collaborative planning sessions that launch the school year, the goals and actions of all three partners and the school continue to be coordinated through weekly Site Team meetings between the three partners and school leadership to ensure maximum impact. This creates integration of the separate services and school resources, ensuring that TDS instructional coaches work with corps members and teachers together so that CY academic interventions are targeted and aligned to curriculum. It also allows corps members to develop deep insights into personal roadblocks students are facing when those students are discussed in EWI meetings so that teachers and CIS can develop more effective intervention strategies. Finally, this partnership ensures that CIS site coordinators are regularly brokering and connecting needed resources to the school and its students.

Pre-intervention / Needs Assessment

Diplomas Now engages in a comprehensive needs assessment at both the school and district level before entering into a partnership. This needs assessment follows this timeline:

1. Initial analysis of school need: At this stage of the needs assessment, Diplomas Now analyzes student outcome data at the school level, examining attendance, course-passing rates, dropout information, assessment scores, behavior data such as school suspensions, and any other available indicators that provide evidence of the school's current status.

2. Initial awareness discussion with district and school leadership: During this second stage of the needs assessment, members of the Diplomas Now management team meet with district and school leadership to provide awareness of the core elements of the Diplomas Now model, review the analysis of district and school data, evaluate the alignment between the core elements of the Diplomas Now program and the improvement priorities of the district and school, assess the costs associated with the implementation of the Diplomas Now model, create an initial timeline for both planning and implementation of the Diplomas Now model at the school site.

3. Awareness activities with school staff: This stage of the needs assessment process involves working with school staff members so that they can better understand the Diplomas Now model.

These events also provide school leadership with the opportunity to survey school staff to gauge their support for moving forward with implementation of the model.

4. Refinement of budget, planning timeline, and implementation plan: This stage of the needs assessment process parallels the awareness activities for school staff. Members of the Diplomas Now management team work with school and district staff to develop a timeline of activities to plan for implementation of the Diplomas Now model, create a plan for implementation of the model's components, develop benchmarks and metrics for measuring the impact of the Diplomas Now model on student outcomes, formulate a budget that provides the appropriate resources to successfully implement the Diplomas Now model.

5. Awareness for families and community members: Before making a final decision regarding a potential partnership, Diplomas Now schedules time to meet with families and other members of the school and district community.

Pillar I: Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities

TDS creates distributed leadership and shared accountability through both its organizational and instructional structures. The small learning community (SLC) structure empowers teacher teams to make a variety of decisions that affect daily instructional activities, resource distribution, and school policies that impact climate, teaching, and learning. First, teacher teams engage in weekly reviews of student data (the Early Warning Indicator or EWI reports), summarizing student outcome data on attendance, behavior, and course passing. Teams then make front-line decisions based on their professional experience and daily interactions with students about what interventions the team and school should implement to ensure students remain on the path to graduation. TDS field managers, instructional

facilitators and school transformation facilitators work with school staff to build and maintain these processes and practices.

Teachers and other staff members at the SLC and teacher team levels engage in a collaborative decision-making process about the use of these funds and take responsibility for developing budgets, planning and implementing, and monitoring the impact of these activities. As a result, the faculty and staff of each SLC engage in distributed leadership and shared accountability for the events that create a positive culture and climate within their academy.

In addition, teachers and staff members engage in collaborative decision-making about school policies that impact culture, climate, and instruction. Specifically, each SLC receives professional development that focuses on building its capacity to design and implement action plans that focus on communications, student attendance, discipline, and academic achievement plans for their students. TDS staff coaches teachers in analyzing data trends, establishing goals for their students and themselves, creating specific plans for implementing strategies and activities focused on helping students succeed, and establishing a system for monitoring and adjusting these plans. This approach to developing policies with a direct impact on students allows Talent Development schools to benefit from the significant knowledge, experiences, and professional education of the entire staff, and results in policies that are “owned” by the entire faculty, rather than policies that are imposed from a traditional top-down administrative structure.

The SLCs in the TDS model intentionally includes a ninth grade academy that guides students through the critical primary to secondary school transition by scheduling the students in cohorts served by designated teacher teams and providing them with the Freshman Seminar transition course and any double dosing in literacy and numeracy that is necessary. Once the students have progressed through the Freshman Seminar unit on career and college exploration, the students will apply for the 10-12 career academy of their choice. These academies are constructed around career groups and offer students courses and enrichment activities connected to the career theme. This progression improves relevance and engagement and creates clear pathways to post-secondary success.

CY corps members and the CIS Student Supports Manager becomes a part of those teacher teams as well. CIS brings a high level of expertise in the social-emotional aspects of students’ lives and outside resources that may assist with discreet cross-curricular units or climate initiatives. This broadens the creative problem-solving strategies of the teacher teams and builds their capacity to maintain a growth mindset when conducting needs analysis and to stay student-centered when building instructional and climate plans. The CY corps members also bring a great deal of reinvigorating energy to the teacher team and, importantly, bring a depth of insight about their individual focus-list students that others in the building are unlikely to have. This insight always prompts community and individual intervention strategies to be far more targeted and effective.

Pillar II: Curriculum and Instruction with Instructional Coaching

The Talent Development model provides ongoing, comprehensive professional development in a variety of ways. First, Talent Development engages staff members in intensive, pre-service training that allows teachers to learn about the Talent Development curriculum and organizational structures, practice teaching lessons using the Talent Development instructional components, and engage in collaborative decision-making and planning for the upcoming school year. A team of Talent Development facilitators is charged with ensuring that school staff receives the information and skills necessary to implement the model.

Once the school year begins, the Talent Development model uses instructional coaches at both the middle and high school levels to provide on-going job-embedded professional development. These instructional coaches engage in collaborative planning and teaching, model new lessons and instructional strategies for teachers, and facilitate guided reflection with teaching staff to increase the capacity for high-impact teaching and learning. While the specific focus of professional development varies depending on staff needs, student outcome data and Talent Development’s evaluation of implementation levels guides stakeholders’ decisions regarding the scope and sequence of professional development activities. Talent Development builds the capacity of these instructional coaches by providing an annual coaches’ institute

and by providing ongoing job-embedded professional development through regular visits to school sites by instructional facilitators.

While Instructional Coaches provide job-embedded professional development focused on teaching and learning, the Talent Development School Transformation Facilitator (STF) works full-time in the building focusing on teaming, structure, timely data utilization, culture, and climate. Before implementation, Talent Development trains and supports the STF to lead the school's planning process. During this planning phase, the STF organizes the staff into various planning committees and facilitates the collective decision-making, planning, and work that they conduct; assists the school's leadership team in the reorganization of the school; and provides technical assistance on issues related to scheduling, staffing, and strategic and tactical planning for implementation. After implementation, the STF focuses on providing ongoing job development and technical assistance to the administrators, team leaders, teacher teams, counselors, and support staff. These professional development activities focus on increasing the school's capacity to build a positive school climate; build and sustain a system of distributive leadership, and engage in ongoing collective decision-making and actions that support student success. In addition to this professional development, instructional staff members also work with one another to increase their collective instructional capacity. During their common planning period, teacher teams examine student work, engage in interdisciplinary planning, and share best practices in an effort to improve instruction.

TDS recognizes that students often arrive at school with significant skills gaps and those students will not be fully successful unless those gaps are quickly and effectively addressed. To do this, double-dose, research-based transition courses have been developed that address literacy and numeracy gaps in grades 6 through 11. These courses meet students at their current skill level and accelerate their learning with the intention of making two or more years' worth of progress within a single school year. Training and support in the scheduling and delivery of these double-dose courses are part of the coaching and technical assistance process. Additionally, recognizing that many students lack fundamental social and academic skills necessary for success, TDS has developed *Mastering the Middle Grades* and *Freshman Seminar*, courses that explicitly develop the basic soft skills that students need to be successful in meeting Common Core and College Readiness standards.

CY corps members support instruction in a number of ways. Each one develops a group of student for a focus list, based on student performance data. Each corps member maintains three lists: one consists of students who require academic help; one for students who require attendance help; and a third of students who require behavioral guidance. Those students on the academic list receive regular tutoring and constant monitoring both in and outside of the classroom. Corps members work inside classrooms during instruction, allowing teachers greater flexibility when differentiating instruction and creating opportunities for real-time academic support for the students. Some of the tutoring is structured as pull-out sessions during class time. This is managed through collaborative planning with the teachers. Other tutoring opportunities occur during lunch and after school.

Pillar III: Tiered Student Supports

DN believes that all students can succeed in school, graduate and pursue college or advanced training as long as they receive the right supports at the right time. To ensure this happens, CIS, CY and TDS work with the school staff to design and implement a tiered system of supports. Tier I supports include whole-school cultural events such as celebratory assemblies that honor not just students on the honor role, but also those who have made real and positive changes or who contribute to the community. It includes whole-school and academy level attendance initiatives, using incentives, competition and positive peer interactions to address attendance and tardiness. Tier I also includes establishing academy-wide common classroom processes and expectations and other culture and climate processes that are driven by teacher teams, student input and data. CY corps members facilitate the creation of large number of targeted events designed to build student and family engagement and to facilitate greater productive dialogue between staff and students. CIS is able to provide access to a wide variety of arts, cultural, and academic events, both inside and outside of school.

Tier II and Tier III supports are for those students who are as yet unable to be fully successful at school. The intention is to identify those students early and to create individualized intervention strategies

that will allow those students to find success. The identification of those students occurs primarily during the Early Warning Indicator (EWI) meetings that teacher teams hold on a weekly or biweekly basis. As with instruction and curriculum, TDS staff will coach school staff in the analysis and use of real-time student data and in the processes that put that data into effective use. During EWI meetings, teachers and support staff examine student course performance, attendance and behavior data; identify those students who are in danger of falling off-track; and design individualized SMART plans to address each student's needs. CIS will provide critical guidance on understanding the social-emotional needs of the students and in creating or locating the most appropriate supports for those students requiring Tier II or III interventions. CY will provide ongoing support for a large number of those Tier II supports, primarily with services for students that are on attendance, behavior and academic focus lists.

Pillar IV: Can-Do Culture and Climate

When Pillars I, II and III are firmly established in a school, the Can-Do Culture and Climate of Pillar IV emerges. In some schools, however, the positive, encouraging environment must come first. Either way, a healthy climate begins with a vision of a student-centered learning environment. In that vision, students and teachers appreciate education, respect and support one another, have opportunities to speak and to listen often, and are accountable, recognized and rewarded. All school personnel, including those not in classrooms, such as security staff and cafeteria employees, need to share the school's vision and to work every day to make it a reality.

This can-do spirit, grounded in research and experience, recognizes the talents and potential of every student. It begins with the philosophy that "if we pull together and draw on each other's experiences, change is possible at scale." Teachers often need professional development and coaching before they are able to fully integrate the change mindset necessary to create this culture and climate. CIS student support managers and TDS instructional and school facilitators provide the research-based practices and support needed for the shift. This is the "nagging and nurturing" philosophy that has been part of Talent Development Secondary since its beginnings and is fundamental to the student centered philosophies of City Year and Communities In Schools. When we draw on all partners' talents and perspectives, we can, and do, solve problems on a large scale.

There are specific quarterly events that are part of the DN model that help build a can-do culture. They include Report Card Conferences and Celebratory Assemblies. Report Card Conference are events in which each student meets individually with an adult who is not their teachers or evaluator, often a professional from a local business or community organization. During those conferences, students are asked to reflect upon their relative success in the last quarter, identify which behaviors have been successful and which have held them back, and commit to making specific changes where necessary. Celebratory Assemblies are organized by teacher teams to build culture and recognize students and staff achievements. They emphasize student voice and honor not only students who are very successful but also those who have made significant improvement and students who contribute in less obvious ways to the culture and success of the school at large.

Strategies for Post-grant Sustainability

The DN model is based on building effective school structures and processes, and building the capacity of school staff to maintain growth without significant external supports. DN recognizes that the direct student supports offered by City Year and Communities In Schools are likely valuable resources for the foreseeable future. DN will work with school administration to identify resources for maintaining those resources and any other supports that may still be advisable through a budget analysis of SGSA and Title I funds and external resources.

Additional Resources

For more information on Diplomas Now, please visit

<http://diplomasnow.org/>

<http://new.every1graduates.org/>