



Illinois State Board of Education

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Abstract

Target Audience

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

Evidence of Effectiveness

MDRC, a nonpartisan, nonprofit education and social policy research organization, conducted an independent, third-party evaluation of Talent Development. This rigorous evaluation focuses on the first five high schools to begin using the model in the School District of Philadelphia. The evaluation follows 20 cohorts of ninth-grade students for up to four years of high school using a comparative interrupted time series research design.

- Talent Development produced substantial gains in attendance, academic course credits earned, and promotion rates during students' first year of high school. These impacts emerged in the first year of implementation and were reproduced as the model was extended to other schools in the district and as subsequent cohorts of students entered the ninth grade.
- Talent Development's strong positive impacts during the first year of high school are consistent with the model's intensive initial focus on the ninth grade and its emphasis on combining high-quality curricular and instructional enhancements with pervasive structural reforms aimed at building supportive and personalized learning environments.
- The improvements in credits earned and promotion rates for ninth-graders were sustained as students moved through high school. Improvements in student performance on the eleventh-grade state standards assessment began to emerge for later cohorts of students as the most intensive components of the model were extended beyond the ninth grade. There are also early indications that Talent Development is improving graduation rates.

The American Youth Policy Forum, using high quality evaluations, identified Talent Development High Schools as a program that supports youth on a path to college and beyond.

Pre-intervention / Needs Assessment

Talent Development Secondary 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, Talent Development Secondary 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 Talent Development Secondary management team meet with district and school leadership to:

- provide awareness of the core elements of the Talent Development Secondary model;
- review the analysis of district and school data;
- evaluate the alignment between the core elements of the Talent Development Secondary program and the improvement priorities of the district and school;
- assess the costs associated with the implementation of the Talent Development Secondary model;
- create an initial timeline for both planning and implementation of the Talent Development Secondary 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 Talent Development Secondary 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 Talent Development Secondary management team work with school and district staff to:

- develop a timeline of activities to plan for implementation of the Talent Development Secondary model;
- create a plan for implementation of the model's components;
- develop benchmarks and metrics for measuring the impact of the Talent Development Secondary model on student outcomes;
- formulate a budget that provides the appropriate resources to successfully implement the Talent Development Secondary model.

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

General Description of Supports Provided

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.

The TDS research based approach is structured around four pillars: Teacher Teams and small learning communities, curriculum and instruction with embedded support, tiered students supports, and a can-do culture and climate.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Middle Grade	High School
Computer and Team Assisted Math Acceleration Lab Student team Literature Savvy Readers’ Lab	Transition to Advanced Mathematics Geometry Foundations Algebra II Foundations Strategic Reading Reading and Writing in Your Career College Prep Reading and Writing

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 with a single school year. Training and support in the scheduling and delivery of these double dose courses is 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 which explicitly develop the foundation soft skill that students need to be successful in meeting Common Core and College Readiness standards.

Pillar III: Tiered Student Supports

TDS 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. In order to ensure this happens, TDS works 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 which honor not just students in the honor role, but students who have made real and positive changes or who contribute to the community. It includes whole school and academy level attendance initiatives which use 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 which are driven by teacher teams, student input and data.

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 which 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 which put that data to 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.

The small learning community structure that TDS helps establish in the school allows for this teaming around smaller cohorts of students and greatly reduces student anonymity and apathy as the academies build a student centered culture that provides students with a clearly defined pathway to success while recognizing that students often face obstacles with which they will need additional assistance.

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.

The TDS 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." Teachers often need professional development and coaching before they are able to fully integrate the change mindset necessary to create this culture and climate. TDS Instructional Facilitators 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. 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 TDS 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. These are often very frank discussion which promote self-awareness and accountability and generate Recovery Contracts and Affirmations written by the students which are shared with their teachers so that follow-up can be immediate and rewarded. Celebratory Assemblies are teacher team organized culture building and student and staff recognition events which emphasize student voice and honor not only students who are very successful but students 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 TDS model is based upon building effective school structures and process and building the capacity of school staff to maintain growth without significant external supports. TDS will work with school administration to identify which supports may still be advisable and help the school develop the means for maintaining those supports.

Additional Resources

For more information on Talent Development Secondary, please visit

<http://www.talentdevelopmentsecondary.com/>