LAYING TRACKS TO GRADUATION

**The First Year
of Implementing
DIPLOMAS NOW**

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August 2014

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Overview

Too many students in high-poverty, urban communities drop out of high school, and too few graduate prepared for college and careers. Three national organizations — Talent Development Secondary, City Year, and Communities In Schools — have formed Diplomas Now in an effort to transform urban secondary schools so fewer students drop out and more graduate ready for postsecondary education and work. Thanks to a validation grant from the U.S. Department of Education's 2010 Investing in Innovation (i3) competition and matching funds from private sources, teams from all three organizations are implementing the Diplomas Now data-driven, tiered intervention model in schools across the nation. The model combines a comprehensive school reform strategy aimed at transforming the academic experience of all students with early warning indicators related to attendance, behavior, and course performance. Diplomas Now identifies students at risk of dropping out and intervenes with targeted support intended to get failing students back on track.

MDRC and ICF International are conducting an independent, experimental evaluation of the impact and implementation of Diplomas Now. During the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years, 62 secondary schools in 11 school districts agreed to participate in this study. Thirty-two of these schools were randomly assigned to implement the Diplomas Now model while the other 30 schools were assigned to a "control group," continuing their existing school programs or implementing other reform strategies of the districts' or schools' choosing. This report introduces Diplomas Now and the associated evaluation, describing the reform model, the research design, and the participating schools and districts. The report also shares first-year implementation fidelity findings, and discusses collaboration among the Diplomas Now partners and between those partners and schools.

- The 62 study schools represent the kinds of schools for which the Diplomas Now model was designed: schools serving students from low-income communities who face challenges inside and outside of school that put their progress to high school graduation at risk. Randomization resulted in two comparable groups of schools and will allow the evaluation team to assess the model's *impact* on key predictors of graduation: attendance, behavior, and course performance.

- On average, implementation of the model got off to a good start in the 32 Diplomas Now schools in the first year. These schools were most successful in adapting a tiered intervention model and incorporating additional student support services like tutoring and after-school programs, but met with less success introducing new curricula and model-specific teacher professional development practices such as peer coaching.

- It is no small feat that three independent national organizations were able to come together and get this multifaceted, complex school reform model off the ground in the implementing schools. Not only did their staff members have to build relationships with one another, they had to collaborate with school personnel to begin changing structures and practices in the implementing schools. However, the roles and responsibilities of staff members from the Diplomas Now organizations were not always clear at the outset, which may have constrained early model implementation. As implementation continues, the Diplomas Now organizations continue to work with each other and schools in an effort to strengthen the cohesion and coordination of reform work by all stakeholders.

Contents

Appendix

List of Exhibits

Table

Figure

Box

Preface

Too many young people growing up in U.S. cities graduate high school unprepared for postsecondary education and the workforce. Many do not graduate at all. While urban districts have tried an array of reform strategies, success on a large scale is rare and school districts that want to invest in reform strategies with evidence of effectiveness have few choices. Fortunately, the federal Investing in Innovation (i3) grant program is helping to expand the number of evidence-based initiatives districts can choose from by including evaluation requirements in its grant awards. Supported by an i3 grant, an ambitious collaboration of three organizations — Talent Development Secondary, City Year, and Communities In Schools — is implementing a reform model in middle schools and high schools intended to keep students from dropping out and help more of them graduate high school. This comprehensive model, called Diplomas Now, is being implemented and evaluated in 11 of the largest urban school districts in the country.

Talent Development Secondary supports instructional improvements and structural changes (like ninth-grade academies to help students transition into high school, and 90-minute instructional blocks in key subjects). In past evaluations, Talent Development Secondary has shown that it can strengthen the organization of schools and get staff members to agree on common goals and practices, and that this kind of systematic reform can make a difference for students. City Year and Communities In Schools are both organizations with national reach that bring additional people to schools. City Year places teams of AmeriCorps volunteers into struggling schools to support before- and after-school programs, provide tutoring and mentoring, and assist teachers in classrooms. Communities In Schools places site coordinators in schools who focus on the students most at risk of dropping out and organize services for them tailored to their individual needs.

This report is the first of three planned for the national evaluation of Diplomas Now. It introduces readers to Diplomas Now and the associated random assignment evaluation, presents findings about the start-up and first year of implementation of Diplomas Now, and discusses important issues regarding collaboration among the three Diplomas Now organizations and between the organizations and the school staffs with which they work. Subsequent reports will examine the continuing implementation of Diplomas Now and present results regarding the model's impact on students and on schools. If proven effective, this model would represent a wise investment of funds from sources like School Improvement Grants, the ambitious federal investment program that aims to fix the nation's most struggling schools by providing grants to help low-performing school districts implement reforms.

Gordon L. Berlin
President

Acknowledgments

Executive Summary

Background

Although the national high school graduation rate has increased over the past decade, too many students (one in five) still do not complete high school in four years.[1] Even if graduation rates continue to rise in school districts across the country, the decreasing number of students who are not graduating will increasingly represent those students who face the most serious barriers to earning their diplomas, those who most need a mix of intensive academic, social, and other interventions to make it through high school.

Research has shown that factors such as poor attendance, poor behavior, and course failure measured as early as middle school predict a student's likelihood of dropping out of high school.[2] Moreover, ninth grade is a critical year, the one when students are the most likely to drop out of school.[3] These research findings suggest that programs may have more impact if they intervene with students who are off track as early as middle school. The majority of dropouts occur in low-income, urban high schools, so programs may also have more impact if they concentrate their efforts there.[4]

Among those students who do graduate high school, many do not graduate ready for college and need to take remedial (developmental education) courses: roughly 40 percent of college undergraduates nationally and almost 60 percent of community college students enroll in such courses.[5] These facts suggest that programs to support struggling students need to prepare students for college as well.

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[1]Richard J. Murnane, "U.S. High School Graduation Rates: Patterns and Explanations," *Journal of Economic Literature* 51, 2 (2013): 370-422.

[2]Robert Balfanz, Liza Herzog, and Douglas J. Mac Iver, "Preventing Student Disengagement and Keeping Students on the Graduation Path in Urban Middle-Grades Schools: Early Identification and Effective Interventions," *Educational Psychologist* 42, 4 (2007): 223-235.

[3]Elaine Allensworth and John Easton, *The On-Track Indicator as a Predictor of High School Graduation* (Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2005); Corrine M. Herlihy and James J. Kemple, *The Talent Development High School Model: Context, Components, and Initial Impacts on Ninth-Grade Students' Engagement and Performance* (New York: MDRC, 2004); Janet Quint, *Meeting Five Critical Challenges of High School Reform: Lessons from Research on Three Reform Models* (New York: MDRC, 2006).

[4]Robert Balfanz, John M. Bridgeland, Mary Bruce, and Joanna Hornig Fox, *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic* (Washington, D.C.: Civic Enterprises, Everyone Graduates Center at the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University, America's Promise Alliance, and Alliance for Excellent Education, 2013).

[5]Paul Attewell, David Lavin, Thurston Domina, and Tania Levey, "New Evidence on College Remediation," *The Journal of Higher Education* 77, 5 (2006): 886-924.

Diplomas Now: Transforming Schools and Responding to the Dropout Challenge

Three national organizations — Talent Development Secondary, City Year, and Communities In Schools — have partnered to take on this combined task of school improvement and dropout prevention, creating *Diplomas Now*. The Diplomas Now whole-school reform model seeks to transform secondary schools in high-poverty, urban communities so that fewer students drop out and more students graduate high school prepared for college and careers.

The Diplomas Now partnership works with schools to ensure that students are getting the support they need to (1) get to school and to class, (2) arrive there ready to learn, and (3) keep up with the lessons being taught. In other words, the pathway to student success in Diplomas Now schools is linked to attendance, behavior, and course performance; as discussed earlier, these "ABCs" are predictive of whether students graduate or drop out. The Diplomas Now model is designed to help schools provide the right services to the right students on time and at the level of intensity necessary for students to have positive ABC outcomes. To do so, Diplomas Now has created a three-tier intervention structure to offer varying levels of support for students with different needs: whole-school organizational restructuring and instructional reform to strengthen the educational experience of all students (Tier I), individual student support (Tier II), and student case management (Tier III). To determine which students need extra Tier II or Tier III support the model relies on regular monitoring of Early Warning Indicator data, which include measures of students' attendance, behavior, and course performance. See Box ES.1 for more on what each of the Diplomas Now partners contributes to the overall model.

The National i3 Evaluation of Diplomas Now: Investigating Diplomas Now Implementation and Effectiveness

Johns Hopkins University, home to Talent Development, was awarded a federal Investing in Innovation (i3) validation grant in 2010 to support the expansion and evaluation of Diplomas Now. This five-year grant supports the expansion of Diplomas Now from a few schools to more than 30 schools across more than 10 school districts. The grant funds also support a rigorous experimental evaluation of the Diplomas Now model, the results of which, if positive, will "validate" Diplomas Now as an effective secondary school reform model. The evaluation, being conducted by two evaluation research firms, MDRC and ICF International, explores not only the impact of Diplomas Now but also its implementation, providing lessons to the field about what it takes to implement the model and how it rolls out in different school and district contexts.

Diplomas Now seeks to strengthen secondary schools so that students follow a path that leads to their graduation from high school ready for college and careers. The Diplomas Now

<div align="center">

Box ES.1

**The Diplomas Now Partners and Their Roles
in a Tiered Intervention System**

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Talent Development Secondary

Talent Development Secondary, based at Johns Hopkins University, provides organizational, instructional, and curricular support to schools. These Tier I interventions are focused on helping *all* students achieve at high levels and preventing them from falling off track. This school-wide effort includes reorganizing students and teachers into small learning communities, providing professional development and coaching to strengthen teacher pedagogy, and supplying college and career preparatory course content. Talent Development Secondary employs a school transformation facilitator who works with school leaders to develop a systematic school organization plan and oversees the implementation of instructional and curricular reforms.

For many students, the Tier I, whole-school organizational and instructional reforms of Talent Development Secondary are enough to keep them on track. However, for some students, additional and more intensive services are necessary. City Year and Communities in Schools play leading roles in providing additional services to these at-risk students.

City Year

City Year is an AmeriCorps program through which young adults, ages 18 to 24, participate in a year of full-time national service. A team of 10 or more City Year corps members is assigned to a school, increasing the number of adults in a building paying attention to students and working with them both in and outside of classrooms. The team is led by a City Year program manager and team leaders (typically second-year corps members), and the corps members are trained to provide a variety of Tier II academic and behavioral interventions intended to help students get on track and stay on track to graduate. These "near peers" (given their proximity in age to the students) serve as tutors, mentors, and role models, personalizing the school experience of the students. In addition, the corps members provide after-school programs and help teachers by working with students during class time.

Communities In Schools

Through a school-based site coordinator, Communities In Schools, a national dropout-prevention organization, draws on school and community resources to organize services intended to move the students at highest risk of dropping out back on track to graduation. The site coordinator assesses the needs of a student, develops an individual case plan for that student that lays out a strategy to address those needs, and connects the student to services aligned with the case plan. The provision of these services represents Tier III intervention. Examples include professional counseling on anger management for a student with severe behavioral issues or long-term tutoring with a subject-area expert for a student falling far behind in class. A site coordinator will also provide direct service — for example, facilitating small student discussion groups on topics like conflict resolution or the transition to adulthood.

model does this through structural reforms, such as the creation of smaller learning communities with teacher teams that work with shared groups of students, and instructional reforms such as peer coaching and curricula designed to help students shore up key academic skills. However, these whole-school efforts that reach all students are not enough on their own. As discussed earlier, the Diplomas Now model also seeks to provide more intensive and targeted support to address the needs of students who exhibit the primary ABC indicators of falling off track that are predictive of dropping out (poor attendance, negative school behaviors, and course failure), particularly during transition years when students are most vulnerable to getting off track: sixth grade in middle schools and ninth grade in high schools. Because the timetable of the current evaluation is not long enough to follow students through high school graduation, the primary research question focuses on measuring the impact of Diplomas Now on ABC outcomes. For students in sixth grade and ninth grade, what is the *impact* of Diplomas Now on three primary student outcomes: attendance rates (proportion of enrolled days in attendance), suspensions (in-school or out-of-school) and expulsions, and successful course completion? Essentially, does the implementation of Diplomas Now result in more students being on track to high school graduation by the end of their middle school or high school transition years?

The evaluation also examines the implementation of the Diplomas Now model, documenting how this complex, multicomponent reform intended to transform secondary schools is implemented by multiple partners. The implementation research explores what it takes to implement the model, what factors facilitate or hinder implementation, and the nature of the collaboration among multiple actors from the Diplomas Now organizations and the schools.

In total, 62 schools (33 middle schools and 29 high schools) from 11 large urban school districts across the country were recruited to participate in the study starting in either the 2011-2012 or 2012-2013 school year. Five of the districts are among the 20 largest school districts in the country, and all but 1 are among the 100 largest.[6] The participating schools, all eligible for Title I funds, serve large populations of low-income and minority students (80 percent eligible for free or reduced-price lunches; 83 percent black and Hispanic). Furthermore, the high schools participating in the study also have weak promoting power (56 percent), suggesting that they struggle to move students from ninth through twelfth grade on time.[7]

Thirty-two of the participating secondary schools were randomly assigned to implement the Diplomas Now model (DN schools) and 30 were assigned to continue with "business as usual" practices and programs (non-DN schools), either maintaining existing practices and

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[6]Chris Plotts and Jennifer Sable, *Characteristics of the 100 Largest Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts in the United States: 2007–08*, NCES 2010-349, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2010).

[7]"Promoting power" is calculated as the ratio of twelfth-grade students to ninth-grade students three years earlier (for example, the ratio of twelfth-graders in 2010-2011 to ninth-graders in 2007-2008).

structures within their schools or pursuing other types of school reform. This random assignment design, often referred to as the "gold standard" in evaluation, creates circumstances under which any differences between the two groups of schools (DN and non-DN) that emerge after random assignment can be attributed to the program; in short, Diplomas Now *caused* the observed differences. Comparisons of the sizes, staff compositions, and student populations of the two groups of schools, as well as the types of programs the schools offered before the start of the evaluation, indicate that the two groups of schools were similar to each other before the evaluation began. This suggests that random assignment was successful and the non-DN schools provide a convincing representation of what would have happened in the DN schools had they not implemented the intervention.

Although the evaluation research will analyze both the impact and the implementation of the Diplomas Now model, this report focuses on program start-up and early implementation in the DN schools. The report presents the model, describes the schools and school districts that are participating in the evaluation, shares findings about first-year implementation fidelity in the DN schools, and discusses how program and school staff members collaborated to implement the DN model.

The Diplomas Now Model

The Diplomas Now model is a multidimensional system of organizational and instructional reforms and targeted forms of student support. These elements are classified as nine "inputs" that the Diplomas Now partners implement in collaboration with school personnel. Some of these inputs represent substantial interventions on their own, such as implementing a rigorous curriculum or setting up a tiered system to identify at-risk students and tailor responses to their specific needs. Diplomas Now integrates these component interventions into a cohesive model focused on ensuring that all students have a path to graduation. Eight of these inputs align with the Four Pillars of Diplomas Now, a characterization of the model used by Diplomas Now staff members to help them organize their work. The Four Pillars and their associated inputs are presented in Figure ES.1.

Pillar I: Teacher Teams and Smaller Learning Communities

Diplomas Now collaborates with school leaders to organize schools such that small groups of teachers work with the same population of students. These smaller learning communities create opportunities for personalization, where teams of teachers know the same students and can work together to best teach and support them. Students also see the same peers in their classes and become known to one another. These teacher teams and smaller learning communities function best when there are opportunities for teachers to collaborate within the daily

Diplomas Now
Figure ES.1
Diplomas Now Logic Model

INPUTS

OUTCOMES

Early

Program Staff Training and Development
(Diplomas Now Summer Institute for school-based staff members, national Diplomas Now Implementation Support Team)

Pillar I.
Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities

Strong Learning Environments
(extended class periods, interdisciplinary teams with common planning time)

Pillar II.
Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development

Professional Development and Peer Coaching
(math and English/language arts instructional coaching, principal leadership network)

Curriculum for College Readiness
(academic reform curriculum, transitional support classes)

Pillar III.
Tiered Student Supports

Tiered Intervention Model
(early warning system and response meetings)

Student Supports
(tutoring, mentoring, near-peer role modeling, after-school programs)

Student Case Management
(needs assessment, counseling, specialized interventions)

Pillar IV.
Can-Do Culture and Climate

Integrated On-Site Support
(transformation facilitator, site coordinator, City Year corps, instructional coaches)

Family and Community Involvement
(school events, parent and community outreach, community service)

School
➢ More positive school climate
➢ Additional after-school activities
➢ Increased stakeholder communication
➢ Increased parent/ community support

Student
➢ Greater confidence and sense of self-worth
➢ Increased engagement and commitment to school learning
➢ Increased effort and persistence
➢ Improved study habits and strategies
➢ More positive relationships with adults and peers

Intermediate

More students on track to graduate
("ABC indicators")
➢ Higher attendance
➢ Better behavior
➢ Improved course performance

Long-term

More students graduate high school and are college-ready/job-competitive

schedule and when they have classes long enough to cover material in depth and keep up the pace of instruction.

Pillar II: Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development

This pillar is focused on teaching and learning, and on giving teachers the training and resources they need to deliver strong lessons. Through professional development activities and instructional coaching, teachers have an opportunity to sharpen their pedagogy. Having curricular materials aligned with college- and career-ready standards means that teachers have useful content to deliver to students. Professional development and curricular materials for accelerated remediation courses for struggling students are also aspects of this pillar.

Pillar III: Tiered Student Supports

Providing more intensive support for students with greater needs is the core idea of this pillar. The tiered intervention model involves implementing an early warning system that draws on data on the ABC indicators of individual students. It relies on staff members who work with a group of students in common having regular times to meet to review those data and to plan interventions for students who are off track or at risk of going off track.

Pillar IV: Can-Do Culture and Climate

School reform is difficult, and school staff members often have too much to do when they are asked to make change. Diplomas Now brings over a dozen staff members to a school to help coordinate school transformation, provide support to the school's staff, provide additional services to students, and engage with families and community organizations. Providing and organizing resources to assist the school's staff helps foster a culture and climate where it feels possible to improve the school and support students better.

The Four Pillars and their eight associated inputs are supported by a ninth input, Program Staff Training and Development, which involves providing the skills and knowledge to Diplomas Now staff members that they need to implement the other eight. This includes training during the summer and during the school year for school-level Talent Development Secondary, City Year and Communities In Schools staff members. To ensure successful implementation at each school, each of the Diplomas Now partner organizations has a support system for school-based staff members that includes local and national program experts with strong relationships to school districts.[8]

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[8]Additional information about Diplomas Now can be found on the Internet at http://diplomasnow.org. The Diplomas Now website includes information about the partner organizations and the model, as well as contact information for the organization.

Implementation of the nine inputs is hypothesized to affect a series of outcomes. (See Figure ES.1.) Initially, model implementation is supposed to lead to early-stage changes in school outcomes such as the quality of school climate and communication among stakeholders, and in student outcomes like study habits and attitudes about and engagement with school. These changes, in turn, are expected to lead to impacts on intermediate outcomes — the ABC indicators of attendance, behavior, and course performance. Positive impacts on ABC outcomes should then lead to increased high school graduation rates.

Fidelity of Implementation of Diplomas Now in the First Year

The evaluation of Diplomas Now begins with an assessment of the fidelity with which the Diplomas Now model was implemented in the 32 schools randomly assigned to do so. That is, in the first year of implementation (2011-2012 for first-wave schools and 2012-2013 for second-wave schools), how well did the model as implemented match its design? How much of the Diplomas Now school-improvement effort was put into place in these 17 middle schools and 15 high schools?

Several primary findings regarding fidelity in the first year emerged from the implementation analysis.

- After the first year, overall model implementation in the 32 DN schools has gotten underway and achieved some traction. On average DN schools successfully implemented 61 percent of 111 separate program components across the nine inputs.

Complex, multifaceted whole-school reforms like Diplomas Now typically take a few years to reach full implementation. Getting the majority of model components implemented in the first year suggests that schools are off to a promising start with this reform.

- However, none of the DN schools were able to implement all of the 62 components of the model believed to be most critical by the Diplomas Now organizations.

The Diplomas Now Implementation Support Team identified a subset of the program components that it hypothesized were the most likely to lead to the desired changes in school and student outcomes. During the first year of implementation, the DN schools struggled to implement some of these "critical" components. For example, in some schools, school-level Diplomas Now staff members were not in place to begin work with school personnel by the start of the academic year. Many middle schools did not get the Diplomas Now reform curricula in place. Only about half of the schools managed to hold Early Warning Indicator meetings weekly. And although instructional support for English/language arts and math

teachers was provided at many schools, instructional coaches struggled to work with teachers as often as the model design prescribed. So while the schools got off to a generally strong start with implementation, it may be that they could have focused more intently on some aspects of the model hypothesized to be the most important.

- DN schools were most successful during the first year in offering schools integrated on-site support, implementing a tiered intervention model, and adding student support services like tutoring and after-school programs into the existing school structure.

Taken together, this means that Diplomas Now was most successful at combining data-driven identification of student needs (catching students who are off track) with the means to respond to those needs through coordinated programs and personnel (getting those students back on track). These are essential functions of the Diplomas Now focus on students' progress toward high school graduation.

- DN schools were less successful in adopting new curricula and implementing peer coaching models, both of which require gaining the trust and investment of school administrators and teachers, and which may require additional time to implement as a result.

Qualitative data reveal that school staff members were not always convinced of the value of implementing new curricula, and that some teachers were reluctant to be "coached." These findings speak to the importance of giving a school's staff a role in selecting some school-level program staff members, if possible, to encourage greater rapport and trust between school and Diplomas Now staff members. This is especially the case for instructional coaches, who frequently interact with teachers on a one-on-one, peer-to-peer basis.

Collaborative Interactions Among Diplomas Now Partners and School Staff Members

School improvement necessitates that people act, react, and interact in new ways, and effective collaboration is essential to such change. Effective collaboration is at the heart of the complex Diplomas Now school reform, which deploys staff members from Talent Development, City Year, and Communities In Schools to work in concert with each other and with school staff members to implement the tiered model in school buildings. As designed, the program needs individuals from the three partner organizations to establish shared norms for working together, communicating continuously, sharing leadership responsibilities, and making decisions together in order to achieve the program goals of addressing student attendance, behavior, and course performance.

As part of its research, the evaluation team investigated the collaborations that were part of first-year implementation. These collaborations did not only include those among staff members from the three Diplomas Now partner organizations, but also those between Diplomas Now program staff members and school personnel.

- Two aspects of collaboration appeared to be most important across schools and various role groups: investment and role clarity.

Administrators and teachers are key stakeholders whose engagement in implementing the Diplomas Now model inputs is indispensable. In order to become actively engaged, it is important that they understand the model through activities such as information sessions and meeting school staff members at other DN schools. Continual communication, including regular meetings and informal check-ins, helps build the trust and acceptance necessary for the collaborative work of model implementation.

In addition, it is crucial that Diplomas Now school-based staff members establish their purposes and roles, with teachers and administrators as well as among themselves. The influx of Talent Development, City Year, and Communities In Schools staff members provided schools with the human resources necessary for the implementation of the Diplomas Now model. However, increased clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of these Diplomas Now staff members would have further improved model implementation in the first year. Considering the numerous program components implemented at DN schools, and the number of additional staff members enlisted to support implementation, it is understandable that both Diplomas Now program staff members and school staff members experienced uncertainty about each other's roles and expectations. Especially during the first year, it would be very helpful to clarify these roles, responsibilities, and expectations through additional guidance and program staff training, school staff training, and joint training. In their continuing work in the schools in this study, Diplomas Now has been taking such steps. Furthermore, hiring Diplomas Now school-based staff members before the academic year begins appears to facilitate cooperation that results in quicker implementation of short-term program goals and better planning for longer-term initiatives.

Next Steps

This report is the first of three planned for this evaluation. Over the course of the evaluation, the impact and implementation research presented in these three reports will tell the story of what Diplomas Now is, what it took to implement the Diplomas Now model, what it looked like as implemented in schools around the country, and how it ultimately differed from business as

usual in the districts in which it was implemented. In addition, the evaluation will provide evidence about the impact of Diplomas Now on schools and students. The next two reports will present findings about the continuing implementation of Diplomas Now, whether implementation of the model is changing DN schools and making them different in their organization and practices from non-DN schools, and finally the impact of Diplomas Now on student outcomes.

Chapter 1

Introduction

High school graduation rates in the United States have been on the rise. Mostly stagnant from 1970 to 2000, the national graduation rate has risen steadily from 2000 to 2010.[1] The graduation rate rose from 71.7 percent in 2001 to 78.2 percent in 2010, and the number of high schools where large proportions of students are unlikely to graduate declined from 2,007 in 2002 to 1,424 in 2011.[2] While this is good news for the nation, the reality is that too many students (one in five) still do not complete high school within four years. Even reforms that have significantly improved high school graduation rates have not solved the dropout problem. For example, district-wide reform in New York City has increased the number of nonselective small high schools there, implemented a choice system that gives students the opportunity to rank the high schools they would like to attend, and closed large, failing high schools; this reform has resulted in positive impacts on four-year high school graduation rates that are close to 10 percentage points. However, the students benefiting from attending the newer small schools still only graduate at a 70 percent rate, meaning that plenty do not finish on time, if at all.[3] Also, even if graduation rates continue to rise in school districts across the country, the decreasing number of students who do not graduate will represent more and more those students who face the most serious barriers to earning their diplomas, those who most need intensive academic, social, and other interventions to make it through high school.

Researchers know more and more about the factors that predict which students are likely to drop out and not graduate from high school. Earning course credits and not failing courses in ninth grade is highly predictive of being on track to graduate high school.[4] The ninth-grade year is a particularly important time of transition for students, and represents the time when students are most likely to drop out of school.[5] Signs of students being at risk of struggling in ninth grade and eventually dropping out are also evident in middle school. As early as the sixth grade, 60 percent of future school dropouts in high-poverty schools exhibit indicators of falling off track — poor attendance, poor behavior, and poor course performance (that is, course failure).[6] These complementary on-track and off-track indicators suggest ways to intervene with

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[1]Murnane (2013).

[2]Balfanz, Bridgeland, Bruce, and Fox (2013) refer to these schools as "dropout factories," defined as high schools where twelfth-grade enrollment is 60 percent or less of the ninth-grade enrollment three years earlier.

[3]Bloom and Unterman (2013).

[4]Allensworth and Easton (2005).

[5]Herlihy and Kemple (2004); Quint (2006).

[6]Balfanz, Herzog, and Mac Iver (2007).

students in secondary schools that could increase their likelihood of graduating. Given how pivotal the ninth grade is, high school interventions could prepare to respond promptly to signs of students going off track during that crucial transition year and include support for on-track behaviors and performance. Given that students may start to exhibit off-track behaviors in the middle grades, middle school interventions could focus on addressing those behaviors early, as students transition into middle school, and then on preparing them for a successful transition into high school.

We also know where to find many of the students most at risk of dropping out. Approximately half of all high school dropouts attend high schools where the size of the twelfth-grade class is 60 percent or less of its ninth-grade size three years earlier. These high schools, and the middle schools that feed into them, are located predominantly in low-income, urban areas.[7] Given the concentration of students at risk of dropping out in these communities and schools, intensive reform efforts are probably necessary to help them overcome challenges inside and outside of school that impede their paths to graduation. Also, given the concentration of the dropout problem, reform efforts that involve structures and practices explicitly intended to address factors predictive of dropping out could help reduce the number of dropouts and help graduation rates continue to rise.

In the 21st century, supporting students through high school graduation is not usually enough to guarantee that they have the tools to live self-sufficient and productive lives. Most students also aspire to attend college, and need to leave high school with the skills and knowledge required to succeed in postsecondary education. Unfortunately, many students are not leaving high schools with these skills even when they succeed in graduating. Across the nation, roughly 40 percent of college undergraduates enroll in at least one developmental education course (remedial, non-credit-bearing courses that students are required to take if they do not meet the knowledge and skill standards of credit-bearing courses). That number is far greater for students in community college (where many low-income students from urban areas enroll), where almost 60 percent of students enroll in at least one developmental course.[8] Beyond supporting struggling students to graduation, school improvement efforts need to ensure that all students participate and succeed in rigorous curricula that prepare them for college and careers.

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[7]Balfanz, Bridgeland, Bruce, and Fox (2013).
[8]Attewell, Lavin, Domina, and Levey (2006).

Diplomas Now: Transforming Schools and Responding to the Dropout Challenge

Three national organizations — Talent Development Secondary, City Year, and Communities In Schools — have partnered to take on this combined task of school improvement and dropout prevention, creating *Diplomas Now*. The Diplomas Now whole-school reform model seeks to transform secondary schools in high-poverty, urban communities so that fewer students drop out and more students graduate high school prepared for college and careers.

The Diplomas Now partnership works with schools to ensure that students are getting the support they need to (1) get to school and to class, (2) arrive there ready to learn, and (3) keep up with the lessons being taught. In other words, the pathway to student success in Diplomas Now schools is linked to <u>a</u>ttendance, <u>b</u>ehavior, and <u>c</u>ourse performance — the "ABCs" predictive of whether students graduate or drop out. The Diplomas Now model is designed to help schools provide the right services to the right students on time and at the level of intensity necessary for students to have positive ABC outcomes. To do so, Diplomas Now has created a three-tier intervention structure that offers varying levels of support for students with different needs. The Diplomas Now model relies on regular monitoring of Early Warning Indicator (EWI) data, which include measures of students' attendance, behavior, and course performance, to determine which students need extra support.

The first tier is focused on helping all students achieve at high levels and preventing them from falling off track. Talent Development Secondary, based at Johns Hopkins University, provides organizational support to schools, helping leaders structure their schools to produce conditions under which students are more likely to succeed. Specifically, it helps schools reorganize students and teachers into small learning communities, within each of which an interdisciplinary group of teachers can collaborate and focus their attention on a smaller group of shared students. Talent Development Secondary also provides instructional and curricular support to schools, seeking to strengthen pedagogy and course content so that teachers can better educate students. To do all this, Talent Development Secondary employs a school transformation facilitator who works with school leaders to develop a systematic plan integrating the host of services the Diplomas Now team can bring to a school. The school transformation facilitator also oversees curricular reforms at the school and works with English/language arts and math instructional coaches to ensure the school is employing college readiness standards for all students, helping teachers improve their pedagogy, and offering ample remediation for students struggling to meet college readiness goals.

For many students, the Tier I, whole-school organizational and instructional reforms of Talent Development Secondary are enough to keep them on track. However, for some students, additional and more intensive services are necessary. Through regular review of the ABC indicators, Diplomas Now and school staff members identify students who are starting to get off

track based on slipping attendance, more frequent misbehavior, or declining performance in class. The school transformation facilitator coordinates meetings to discuss students' EWI data with Diplomas Now school-based staff members, interdisciplinary teams of teachers, and other support personnel at the school (counselors, for example). During these meetings, staff members discuss possible causes for individual students' off-track behaviors and determine what actions to take to help those students get back on track to graduation. Much of the work of City Year and Communities in Schools is in supporting these at-risk students.

City Year is an AmeriCorps program through which young adults, ages 18 to 24, participate in a year of full-time national service. City Year corps members, led by a program manager and supported by experienced (second-year) corps members who act as team leaders, are trained to provide individual, small-group, and school-wide academic and behavioral interventions intended to help students get on track and stay on track to graduate. As part of the Diplomas Now model, a team of 10 or more City Year corps members is assigned to a school, increasing the number of adults in a building paying attention to students and working with them both in and outside of classrooms. These "near peers" (given their proximity in age to the students) serve as tutors, mentors, and role models, personalizing the students' school experience through one-on-one relationships. The corps members also provide after-school programs. These services strengthen Tier I whole-school reforms and are considered a critical part of the Tier II interventions meant for students who are showing signs of falling off track on one or more of the ABC indicators.

Communities In Schools is a national dropout-prevention organization that has been working with schools for over 30 years. Through a school-based site coordinator, Communities In Schools draws on in-school and community resources to organize both school-wide and individual services intended to address obstacles to students' progress to graduation. Within the Diplomas Now model, the Communities In Schools' site coordinator is a critical player in addressing the needs of the students facing the most challenges and at the highest risk of dropping out, as measured by the ABC indicators. The site coordinator supports these students through a set of Tier III interventions. The site coordinator assesses the needs of a student, develops an individual case plan for that student that lays out a strategy for addressing those needs, and then connects the student to services in and outside of school that align with the case plan. Examples of these Tier III intervention services include professional anger-management counseling for students with severe behavioral issues, and long-term tutoring with subject-area experts for students falling particularly far behind in those subjects. Not only might a site coordinator connect a student to other service providers, but he or she typically provides direct service as well — for example, facilitating small student discussion groups on topics specific to needs they might have, such as conflict resolution or the transition to adulthood.

The team of Diplomas Now and school staff members continues to use EWI data to monitor the progress of all struggling students receiving Tier II or Tier III interventions intended to help them get back on track. The level of service a student receives may change depending on how long that student is off track and on whether his or her ABC indicators grow more negative or positive over time. Talent Development Secondary's organizational and instructional reforms are thus bolstered by the programs and staffs of City Year and Communities In Schools, which address the academic, behavioral, and social challenges faced by individual students, particularly those students most at risk of dropping out. All three groups also work to strengthen parent and community involvement in the school by sponsoring family and community events, working with community leaders to identify new resources for the school and students, and involving parents more directly in students' education and progress.

Ideally, the Diplomas Now team starts working with a school during the spring prior to the first year of implementation. At that time, Diplomas Now can work with the school administrators to plan program implementation and identify and hire the new staff. This also allows school administrators and staff members to attend the Diplomas Now summer institute before the first implementation year, and allows ample time for the training of Diplomas Now staff members at the school. The Diplomas Now staff focuses its attention on students in transition years (sixth and ninth grades) during the first year of implementation. Support in these transition years is the strongest because they are so important in a student's trajectory toward graduation. In subsequent years, the Diplomas Now staff follows and keeps supporting these students, but also continues to add resources in order to support and follow new cohorts of sixth- and ninth-grade students.

Prior research on the Talent Development Secondary whole-school reform model has shown evidence of improvement in the academic achievement, school progress, and attendance of students in urban secondary schools.[9] However, on their own Talent Development Secondary's organizational and instructional reforms cannot address the multiple challenges that some students from low-income communities face that put them on a pathway to dropping out. Although Kemple, Herlihy, and Smith found that Talent Development Secondary had positive impacts on students' academic achievement and ninth-grade completion, they also indicated that many students were still not making adequate progress. They suggested that programs like Talent Development Secondary needed more "power" in order to have success with more students. They also indicated that Talent Development Secondary was not having an impact on students who repeated the ninth grade, one example of the kinds of students who need more intensive intervention if they are to make it to graduation.[10] By collaborating with City Year and

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[9]Kemple, Herlihy, and Smith (2005).
[10]Kemple, Herlihy, and Smith (2005).

Communities In Schools in Diplomas Now, Talent Development Secondary is now part of a more powerful reform model that combines its whole-school reforms with City Year and Communities In Schools staff members and programs that focus on the students most at risk of dropping out. The three organizations' unique partnership represents a multidimensional approach to school reform that includes structural and curricular reforms for the entire school, professional development opportunities for teachers and school staff members, a data-driven student tracking system to identify at-risk students, and an auxiliary staff to support teachers and other school staff members and to work directly with at-risk students.

These various organizational and instructional reforms and targeted student support services are displayed as Diplomas Now model "inputs" in Figure 1.1. These nine inputs represent elements of the model that the Diplomas Now partners implement in schools with the collaboration of the school's staff. As noted earlier, Diplomas Now is a multidimensional system of reforms, and some of these inputs represent substantial interventions on their own — for example, implementing a rigorous curriculum or setting up a tiered system to identify at-risk students and tailor responses to their specific needs. Diplomas Now integrates these component interventions into a cohesive model focused on ensuring that every student has a path to graduation. Eight of these inputs align with the Four Pillars of Diplomas Now, a characterization of the model used by Diplomas Now staff members to help them organize their work:

I.   Teacher Teams and Smaller Learning Communities

II. Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development

III. Tiered Student Supports

IV. Can-Do Culture and Climate

Pillar I is focused on school organization. Pillar II is about instructional reform, supporting stronger teaching and providing meaningful curricula. Pillar III is about aligned student support — matching the intensity of service or support to the level of need a student exhibits. Pillar IV is focused on (1) ensuring that the Diplomas Now staff members requisite for model implementation are in place at a school and (2) building positive attitudes about school change. The pillars and their associated inputs are described in more detail below.

Pillar I: Teacher Teams and Smaller Learning Communities. As discussed earlier, Diplomas Now collaborates with school leaders to organize schools such that small groups of teachers work with the same students. These smaller learning communities create opportunities for personalization, where teams of teachers know the same students and can work together to best teach and support them. Students also see the same peers in their classes, and become known to one another. These teacher teams and smaller learning communities function best

Diplomas Now
Figure 1.1
Diplomas Now Logic Model

INPUTS

OUTCOMES
Early

Program Staff Training and Development
(Diplomas Now Summer Institute for school-based staff members, national Diplomas Now Implementation Support Team)

Pillar I.
Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities

Strong Learning Environments
(extended class periods, interdisciplinary teams with common planning time)

Pillar II.
Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development

Professional Development and Peer Coaching
(math and English/language arts instructional coaching, principal leadership network)

Curriculum for College Readiness
(academic reform curriculum, transitional support classes)

Pillar III.
Tiered Student Supports

Tiered Intervention Model
(early warning system and response meetings)

Student Supports
(tutoring, mentoring, near-peer role modeling, after-school programs)

Student Case Management
(needs assessment, counseling, specialized interventions)

Pillar IV.
Can-Do Culture and Climate

Integrated On-Site Support
(transformation facilitator, site coordinator, City Year corps, instructional coaches)

Family and Community Involvement
(school events, parent and community outreach, community service)

School
➤ More positive school climate
➤ Additional after-school activities
➤ Increased stakeholder communication
➤ Increased parent/ community support

Student
➤ Greater confidence and sense of self-worth
➤ Increased engagement and commitment to school learning
➤ Increased effort and persistence
➤ Improved study habits and strategies
➤ More positive relationships with adults and peers

Intermediate

More students on track to graduate ("ABC indicators")
➤ Higher attendance
➤ Better behavior
➤ Improved course performance

Long-term

More students graduate high school and are college-ready/job-competitive

when there are opportunities for teachers to collaborate within the daily schedule, for example through common planning time, and when they have class periods long enough to cover material in depth and keep up the pace of instruction. The input "Strong Learning Environments" captures these organizational aspects of this pillar.

Pillar II: Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development. This pillar is focused on teaching and learning, and on giving teachers the training and resources they need to deliver strong lessons. Two inputs are aligned with this pillar — "Professional Development and Peer Coaching" and "Curriculum for College Readiness." Through professional development activities and instructional coaching, teachers have an opportunity to sharpen their pedagogy. Having curricular materials aligned with college- and career-ready standards means that these teachers have useful content to deliver to students. These two inputs also cover professional development, along with curricular materials for accelerated remediation courses for struggling students.

Pillar III: Tiered Student Supports. Providing more intensive support for students with greater needs is the core idea of this pillar, and the three inputs aligned with this goal are "Tiered Intervention Model," "Student Supports," and "Student Case Management." The tiered intervention model involves implementing an early warning system, which in turn requires access to data on the ABC indicators of individual students. It also means that the staff members who work with a group of students in a smaller learning community need regular times to meet to review those data and to plan interventions for students who are off track or at risk of going off track. City Year and Communities In Schools must then be able respond to off-track students' needs, supplementing the efforts of classroom teachers through Tier II and Tier III interventions.

Pillar IV: Can-Do Culture and Climate. School reform is difficult, and the school staff often has too much to do when asked to make change. It is important to make change feel possible and create a positive environment of improvement, so that the school staff members can buy into reforms, develop high expectations, and see the reform effort as a coordinated whole and not small, disconnected pieces. The inputs of "Integrated On-Site Support" and "Family and Community Involvement" are about providing additional support to schools to help them do so. Diplomas Now brings over a dozen staff members to a school to help coordinate school transformation, provide support to the school's staff, and provide additional services to students. Figure 1.2 displays these school-based Diplomas Now staff members. In addition, Diplomas Now staff members seek to involve families and communities in their schools to provide additional support to students. Providing and organizing resources to assist the school's staff helps foster a culture and climate where it feels possible to improve the school and support students better.

Diplomas Now

Figure 1.2

Diplomas Now Organizational Structure

School-Level Teams		
Staff members from all three organizations who work with administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members.		
Talent Development	**City Year**	**Communities In Schools**
School transformation facilitator Oversees implementation of structural and curricular reforms **English/language arts and math instructional coaches** District employees trained and assisted by instructional facilitators to support school staff professional development and peer coaching	**Program manager** Oversees corps members and manages relationships with school staff members, and student support programs **Corps members** Tutor and mentor Tier II students during the school day and in after-school programs; more experienced corps members may be designated as "team leaders" with additional leadership responsibilities	**Site coordinator** Implements needs assessments and case management of Tier III students

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Diplomas Now Local Executive Teams
Regional and district-level leaders who support the school-level staff

Talent Development district field managers, instructional facilitators, and school and student support services (S4) facilitators

Communities In Schools regional executive directors

City Year managing directors

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Diplomas Now Implementation Support Team (DNIST)
National team with representatives from all three organizations that supports local executive teams

The ninth input, "Program Staff Training and Development," shown at the far left of Figure 1.1, is about providing the skills and knowledge to Diplomas Now staff members that they need to implement the other eight model inputs under the Four Pillars. This includes training for school-level Talent Development Secondary, City Year, and Communities In Schools staff members during the summer prior to the school year, and continuing training throughout the school year. To ensure successful implementation at each school, each of the Diplomas Now partner organizations has a support system for school-based staff members that includes local and national program experts with strong relationships to school district staffs. The Talent Development Secondary school transformation facilitator, City Year program manager, and Communities In Schools site coordinator work with school administrators to oversee the implementation of various program inputs. They also work together to ensure clear lines of communication and support between the school's program staff and the local executive teams from each organization, which in turn are in communication with the national-level Diplomas Now Implementation Support Team, as shown in Figure 1.2.[11]

Figure 1.1 also shows the hypothesized connection of the model's inputs to early, intermediate, and longer-term school and student outcomes. Initially, the model is supposed to lead to changes in school outcomes such as school climate and communication among stakeholders, and in student outcomes such as study habits and attitudes about and engagement with school. These changes, in turn, are expected to lead to impacts on intermediate outcomes — the ABC indicators of attendance, behavior, and course performance. Positive impacts on ABC outcomes should then lead to increased high school graduation rates. Given the complexity of the Diplomas Now model, it can take up to three years for a school to fully implement all components of the model at a high level. Evaluation research makes it possible to understand the implementation of the Diplomas Now model and how it progresses over time, as well as its effects on schools and students. The next section of this chapter describes the national evaluation of the implementation and impact of the Diplomas Now secondary school reform model. What does it take to implement the Diplomas Now model? How does model implementation make schools different from others struggling with the same challenges and trying other school improvement strategies? Does implementation lead to the hypothesized changes in school and student outcomes?

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[11]Additional information about Diplomas Now can be found on the Internet at http://diplomasnow.org. The Diplomas Now website includes information about the partner organizations and the model, as well as contact information for the organization.

The National i3 Evaluation of Diplomas Now: Investigating Diplomas Now's Implementation and Effectiveness

Johns Hopkins University, home to Talent Development Secondary, was awarded a federal Investing in Innovation (i3) validation grant in 2010 to support the expansion and evaluation of Diplomas Now. Box 1.1 describes the i3 program. There were almost 1,700 i3 grant applications in 2010, and the i3 validation grant won by Johns Hopkins University that year was one of 49 awarded, of which 15 were validation grants. This five-year validation grant was intended to support the expansion of Diplomas Now from a few schools to more than 30 schools across 10 or more school districts. At the same time, the grant funds support a rigorous experimental evaluation of the Diplomas Now model, the results of which, if positive, will "validate" Diplomas Now as an effective secondary school reform model. The evaluation is intended not only to assess the impact of Diplomas Now but also to explore its implementation, providing lessons to the field about what it takes to implement the model and how it rolls out in different school and district contexts.

MDRC and ICF International, policy research firms independent of the Diplomas Now partner organizations, are conducting the national i3 evaluation of Diplomas Now. The foundation of the evaluation is a school-level random assignment design. That is, within school districts participating in the i3-funded expansion of Diplomas Now, schools eligible for model implementation are assigned randomly (through a lottery-like process) to implement Diplomas Now (DN schools) or to continue with business as usual (non-DN schools), either continuing existing practices and structures within their schools or pursuing other types of school reform. Random assignment is often referred to as the "gold standard" in evaluation design because it creates circumstances under which any differences between the two groups of schools (DN and non-DN) that emerge after random assignment can be attributed to the program (Diplomas Now): Diplomas Now *caused* the observed differences.

As discussed earlier, the Diplomas Now model seeks to address the needs of students who exhibit the primary ABC indicators of falling off track that are predictive of dropping out: poor attendance, negative school behaviors, and poor course performance (particularly course failure). Students are also more vulnerable to getting off track during transition years, typically sixth grade in middle schools and ninth grade in high schools. Therefore, the evaluation measures the impact of Diplomas Now on ABC outcomes during students' sixth- and ninth-grade years. For sixth-grade and ninth-grade students, the evaluation asks three primary research questions:

1. What is the impact of Diplomas Now on students' attendance rates (proportion of enrolled days in attendance)?

Box 1.1

The Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund

The i3 fund is a U.S. Department of Education program created as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 that provides funding via competitive grants to school districts, consortia of schools, or nonprofit organizations partnered with school districts. It supports the implementation and evaluation of innovative, promising, and proven practices intended to address persistent educational challenges. The U.S. Department of Education has funded 92 unique i3 projects thus far. Each applicant must provide evidence of effectiveness or promise and must propose an evaluation of the practice, strategy, or program as part of the grant application so that each project will contribute to the larger body of knowledge about the implementation and impact of educational programs in the field. The grants are organized into three tiers, which vary in the amount of prior evidence needed, the rigor of the evaluation expected to coincide with implementation, and the amount of funding available:

1) **Scale-up** grants provide funding to expand to the national level practices, strategies, or programs for which there is strong prior evidence of effectiveness. Evaluators are expected to provide evidence of effectiveness at a national scale.

2) **Validation** grants provide funding to expand at the regional level practices, strategies, or programs that show promise, but for which there is currently only moderate evidence of effectiveness. Evaluators are expected to show evidence of effectiveness.

3) **Development** grants support the development of high-potential but relatively untested practices, strategies, or programs. Evaluators are expected to show evidence of promise.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education (2013).

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2. What is the impact of Diplomas Now on the proportion of enrolled days suspended (in school or out of school) or expelled?

3. What is the impact of Diplomas Now on the proportion of attempted core courses passed?

Essentially, does the implementation of Diplomas Now result in fewer students getting off track and more students staying on track to eventual high school graduation during their transition years into middle school or high school? The impact analyses to answer these questions will focus on sixth- and ninth-grade students in the second year after random assignment, when DN schools will be in their second year of implementing the model and at least some staff members will already have a year of experience working within the Diplomas Now framework.

The focus is on second-year impacts because research suggests that it takes time for the true impacts of whole-school reform, representing large-scale change in a school, to emerge.[12]

The evaluation will also answer related, exploratory research questions. Although the timeline of the evaluation is not long enough to follow high school students through graduation or middle school students through their ninth-grade transition year into high school, the study team will analyze the impact of Diplomas Now on the ABC outcomes of seventh- and tenth-graders. In addition, the research will investigate impacts on other attendance, behavior, and course performance outcomes, most notably the impact of Diplomas Now on a composite student "on-track" indicator based on achieving 90 percent attendance, not being suspended, passing math and English/language arts courses, and being promoted on time to the next grade. The study team will also analyze the impact of Diplomas Now on outcomes believed to be precursors to changes in ABC outcomes: the early outcomes presented in Figure 1.1, such as changes in school climate, the availability of after-school programs, and students' self-confidence, effort in school, and study habits. Furthermore, the evaluation will explore whether the impacts vary based on school or student characteristics, such as school level (middle or high) or whether students were already on or off track when model implementation started.

To complement the research on the impacts of Diplomas Now, the evaluation also includes research on the implementation of the model. The Diplomas Now model is a complex, multicomponent reform that brings together multiple partners. Documenting the implementation of this complex reform in districts and schools around the country over the next few years will inform the field about implementing partnership models like this one. It will also add context to the impact evaluation and allow the research team to explore the relationship between how faithfully the model is implemented and student outcomes. The implementation research will investigate what it takes to implement the Diplomas Now model, and whether the national implementation of Diplomas Now in DN schools resulted in differences in organization and practice from the non-DN schools. The evaluation plans to address the following research questions:

1. How did the intervention as implemented compare with the intervention as planned?

2. How much variation in implementation fidelity was there across sites?

3. What were the factors that facilitated or hindered implementation of the Diplomas Now model?

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[12]Borman, Hewes, Overman, and Brown (2003).

4. How did DN schools compare with non-DN schools in their structures, programs, and practices? In other words, did the implementation of Diplomas Now create a difference in the structures, programs, and practices of DN schools and non-DN schools?

In combination, the impact and implementation research will provide valuable information about Diplomas Now. The evaluation will tell the story of what Diplomas Now is, what it took to implement the Diplomas Now model, what it looked like as implemented in schools around the country, and how ultimately it differed from business as usual in those schools' districts. In addition, the evaluation will provide evidence about how Diplomas Now affects schools and students, and about whether it makes a difference.

Orientation to This Report

This report is the first of three planned as part of this evaluation. These three reports are organized to follow the narrative of Diplomas Now implementation. This first report focuses on program start-up and early implementation in the DN schools. The second report will present findings about the implementation of Diplomas Now in the second year, and whether implementation of the model is making DN schools different in their organization and practices from non-DN schools. In addition, it will discuss possible early-stage changes that Diplomas Now might produce in schools and students, presenting the impacts of Diplomas Now on early outcomes such as the availability of after-school programs and student engagement with and effort in school. The third and final report will focus on answering the primary research questions of this evaluation, presenting Diplomas Now's impacts on student attendance, behavior, and course performance.

The rest of this report will present information about the schools participating in the evaluation, share findings about first-year implementation fidelity in the DN schools, and discuss how different groups collaborated in the implementation of the DN model. Chapter 2 presents information on the study sample and discusses the assignment of schools at random to implement Diplomas Now or to continue with business as usual. The chapter describes the schools and districts participating in the study and how they were recruited, and compares the randomly assigned DN and non-DN schools at baseline (that is, at the start of the study, before Diplomas Now model implementation began in the DN schools). In addition, the chapter discusses whether DN and non-DN schools had preexisting characteristics similar to features or practices that are part of the Diplomas Now model. Chapter 3 presents findings about the implementation of the Four Pillars of Diplomas Now and the associated program inputs, including how much of the model was implemented in DN schools in the first year. The fourth

and final chapter describes the collaboration of staff members from the three Diplomas Now organizations with each other and with school administrators and teachers, and considers factors that facilitated or hindered collaboration.

Chapter 2

School Districts and Schools Participating in the Diplomas Now i3 Evaluation

The national evaluation of Diplomas Now has, as its foundation, a study sample of 62 secondary schools from 11 urban school districts around the country. These schools were assigned through a lottery-like process (that is, random assignment) either to implement the Diplomas Now model or to continue with "business-as-usual" practices and programs already in place or planned at their schools. This chapter discusses the recruitment of these schools and districts by the Diplomas Now partner organizations, explains their assignment to implement the Diplomas Now model or not, and describes how the schools compare with others in their districts and the nation. The chapter also discusses how the two assigned groups of schools compare with one another, and provides preliminary information about whether practices and programs similar to those that are part of the Diplomas Now model were in place at these schools prior to the start of Diplomas Now model implementation.

This chapter will make several main points about the study sample:

- The 62 schools (33 middle schools and 29 high schools) recruited to participate in the evaluation fit the characteristics of schools for which the Diplomas Now model is designed. The 11 participating school districts tend to be large and midsize urban districts, and the participating schools have high concentrations of high-needs students. Since the Diplomas Now model is designed to assist schools struggling with high dropout rates, it is important to note that, prior to the evaluation, the high schools participating in the study had a lower average rate of success moving students from ninth through twelfth grades than the high schools in the participating school districts as a whole, and than high schools across the country as a whole.

- Overall, the 32 schools implementing the Diplomas Now program (DN schools) and the 30 comparison schools not implementing the program (non-DN schools) were not statistically different before the start of the evaluation in various measures of student body size, staff size, racial or gender composition, setting, or student socioeconomic status. This similarity suggests that the random assignment of schools was successful and that the non-DN schools provide a convincing representation of what would have happened in the DN schools had they not implemented the intervention.

- Some activities similar to those espoused by the Diplomas Now model were taking place at a majority of the study schools prior to the evaluation, but some essential components of the Diplomas Now model were unlikely to be in place at the study schools.

- No statistically significant differences were found between DN and non-DN schools in any of the survey measures of prestudy programs, further suggesting that the two groups were similar prior to the start of the evaluation.

Recruitment of School Districts and Schools

The Diplomas Now model is designed to strengthen urban middle and high schools that struggle with large populations of students at risk of dropping out. The recruitment of school districts and schools for the Investing in Innovation (i3) Diplomas Now validation grant reflects this design. Diplomas Now focused recruitment efforts on many of the largest school districts in the country. Diplomas Now staff members and district administrators typically targeted schools within these districts with high numbers of high-needs students, as measured by academic achievement. School districts approached about participation in the evaluation and the opportunity to have the Diplomas Now model implemented in a subset of their schools were often places where two of the Diplomas Now partner organizations, Communities In Schools and City Year, already had local presences and existing relationships with district administrators. At least one of those organizations had a presence in every district approached about participation. The presence of one or more of the Diplomas Now partners meant that the recruitment effort could build on existing relationships with district administrators and that the implementation of the Diplomas Now model would not be delayed while partner organizations built up their local infrastructure.

The start-up of Diplomas Now's implementation was staggered over two years, and school districts and schools were recruited and began participating in the evaluation in two waves. The first wave of schools entered the study at the start of the 2011-2012 school year. Twenty-two schools — 9 high schools and 13 middle schools — were recruited in this wave. As schools from a particular district were recruited and agreed to participate in the study, they were assigned to a lottery with one or more schools from the same district, including the same grade levels of students (middle or high schools), and with similar state test scores and preprogram demographic characteristics (percentage of minority students, special education students, students for whom English was a second language, and students of low socioeconomic status). Via these lotteries, schools were randomly assigned to participate in the Diplomas Now model (DN schools) or to continue with "business as usual" (non-DN schools). The business-as-usual condition at the non-DN schools was either the continuation of existing school programs or implementation of another reform strategy of the district's or

school's choosing.[1] The non-DN schools serve as a point of comparison, representing how schools assigned to the Diplomas Now group (and their students) would have performed had they not had the opportunity to implement the intervention. Nine separate lotteries across six school districts were held during the first wave, resulting in 12 DN schools and 10 non-DN schools.

The second wave of schools began participation in the evaluation at the start of the 2012-2013 school year. Forty more schools were recruited for this wave, 20 middle schools and 20 high schools. These schools were randomly assigned through 13 separate lotteries across nine districts resulting in 20 DN schools and 20 non-DN schools.

The end result is a sample of 62 total schools from 11 participating school districts spread across the country, with 32 DN schools and 30 non-DN schools to be included in analyses answering the main research questions exploring attendance, behavior, and course performance for sixth- and ninth-grade students across middle and high schools combined. In some cases, middle school and high school findings will be explored separately; for example, the impact of Diplomas Now on ninth-grade completion will only be examined at the high schools. There are 33 middle schools and 29 high schools in the study.

Challenges to Recruitment

Although site recruitment resulted in a large sample of schools, there were two conditions that affected the recruitment process. First, the recruitment of schools and districts for the i3 Diplomas Now validation grant was affected by the grant timeline and by the need to collect a large enough sample for the required evaluation. Since the grant has a strict five-year time limit, recruitment needed to move at a particularly fast pace. The grant was awarded in the fall of 2010 and a first wave of schools needed to be recruited and begin implementation activities before the 2011-2012 school year. At the same time, a large number of schools needed to be recruited to meet the requirements of the grant and the needs of the study.[2]

Given the tight grant timeline, the Diplomas Now partners restricted themselves to school districts where Communities In Schools and City Year already had a local presence. Focusing on these districts meant that the recruitment effort could build on existing relationships with district administrators, and that implementation would be better positioned for a fast start. The local presence of these two Diplomas Now partners meant that it would be

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[1]The reform strategies and programs taken up by non-DN schools will be described in future reports.

[2]To meet the needs of the experiment, almost double the number of schools need to participate in the study as are planned to implement the program. This allows for random assignment of similar schools into DN and non-DN groups.

easier to identify and recruit staff members to work in schools assigned to implement the Diplomas Now model, and that infrastructure would already be in place for those Communities In Schools and City Year staff members. However, this expectation did mean that some districts interested in bringing Diplomas Now to their schools were not pursued by Diplomas Now as participants in the evaluation, which contributed both to bringing in fewer schools in the first wave (only 22 of the 62 schools were in the first wave of schools to join the study) and extending the recruitment timeline into the summer months, restricting the time for planning and staff training at some schools. Despite this limitation, it may have been wise to focus on districts with Communities In Schools and City Year presences. In the two districts participating in the evaluation where one of those two partners did not already have a presence, start-up proved to be more difficult.

Furthermore, the need to recruit so many schools in such a short time made it harder to gain the school-level commitment needed for smooth implementation at the start of the school year. Particularly in recruiting the first wave of schools, Diplomas Now partners did not have enough time to communicate with and attract the support of school leaders. In most cases Diplomas Now staff members had to reach out to leaders at schools to begin getting them invested in the model after district administrators had already committed their schools to participating in the evaluation. During the second wave of recruitment, the Diplomas Now partners had more opportunities to gain school-level investment before schools committed to participate in the project. Nonetheless, even in the second wave it was not always possible to connect with school leaders early enough. Thus, the need to recruit a large number of schools within the first two years of the i3 grant created challenges in securing school-level investment.

Second, the complexities of getting the necessary funding lined up to implement the Diplomas Now model sometimes limited the total number of schools in a district that could participate, or extended the time it took to complete recruitment in a district. This challenge was probably exacerbated by the cuts to state education funding experienced by most school districts during this time period due to the residual effects of the recession.[3] On average, the start-up year costs to implement Diplomas Now totaled about $491,000. Typically, Talent Development Secondary's costs were $255,000, which covered curricular materials, the school transformation facilitator placed at the school, and technical assistance from mathematics and English/language arts instructional facilitators and from a school and student support services facilitator (who worked across all implementing schools in a district). City Year's costs were about $129,000 for the City Year team of near peers and an on-site program manager. Communities In Schools' costs averaged $107,000 for the Communities In Schools site coordinator, service provision, and infrastructure support. School-level instructional coaches were often an in-kind contribution

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[3]Leachman and Mai (2013).

from the school districts. In the few cases where they were not, those costs were included in Talent Development Secondary's costs (and are reflected in the Talent Development Secondary average cost figure above).

Diplomas Now implementation costs were covered in almost all sites by a combination of Diplomas Now i3 grant money, other funds from the Diplomas Now partners, and district funds. On average, i3 funding covered about $314,000 of the first-year costs of an implementing school. District contributions, in a few cases bolstered by federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) awards, averaged $141,000.[4] Other, privately raised funds accounted for about $36,000 per school.

Description of Participating School Districts

Recruitment for the Diplomas Now i3 evaluation targeted large and midsize urban school districts with high concentrations of high-needs students. Out of the 11 school districts participating in the evaluation, 5 are among the top 20 largest school districts in the country according to the National Center for Education Statistics' review of data from the 2007-2008 school year, and all but one are in the top 100 largest school districts.[5] Table 2.1 displays the characteristics of the 11 school districts participating in the Diplomas Now i3 evaluation during 2010-2011, the school year prior to the start of the evaluation. As noted, the school districts participating in the evaluation are large, with an average of 426 schools and approximately 262,000 students per district. In comparison, the 100 largest school districts have an average of 169 schools and approximately 112,000 students.[6] The school districts participating in the evaluation also have large populations of minority students, with approximately 83 percent black or Hispanic

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[4]The initial plan for covering the costs of implementing the Diplomas Now model counted on the use of federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds for school turnaround or transformation at most school sites. As recruitment proceeded, it became clear that SIG funding was not likely to complete the funding picture in many districts. Although during recruitment the Diplomas Now partners mentioned to school districts that the federal i3 and SIG programs were complementary and potentially aligned, federal and state governmental agencies did not often communicate this alignment. (SIG funds were disbursed from the federal government to state governments. State governments were responsible for the distribution of those funds to school districts.) For example, i3 validation grantees like the Diplomas Now partnership had already been vetted through a competitive process as having evidence-based programs; thus public agencies could have promoted schools intending to implement those programs as a potentially wise investment of SIG funds. In addition, the Diplomas Now staff offered to help complete SIG applications on behalf of DN schools, but this offer was not pursued by some districts, and in others the timing of SIG funding applications and awards did not align with Diplomas Now implementation timelines.

[5]Plotts and Sable (2010).
[6]Plotts and Sable (2010).

Table 2.1

Characteristics of Diplomas Now Study School Districts (2010-2011)

Characteristic	Average
Number of schools	426
Number of students	262,426
Race/ethnicity of students (%)	
Black	46.0
Hispanic	36.6
Asian	4.6
White	11.3
Other	1.3
Number of students per teacher	15.8
English language learner students (%)	11.3
Special education students (%)	14.9
Sample size	11

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Sciences, Common Core of Data, "Local Education Agency Universe Survey," 2010-2011.

students (46 percent black and 37 percent Hispanic). This is approximately 20 percentage points higher than the average across the 100 largest school districts.[7] The participating school districts also have a higher percentage of special-education students than the 100 largest school districts.[8] The districts participating in the evaluation represent many regions across the country including the Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, South, and West.

Description of Participating Schools

Diplomas Now targets middle and high schools believed to be most able to benefit from the Diplomas Now model, typically schools serving large populations of high-needs students. These schools are generally high-poverty, urban schools with large populations of minority students. This is reflected in Table 2.2, which compares schools participating in the evaluation with other schools in the participating school districts, and with the national average. In

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[7]On average, 63 percent of students are black or Hispanic (26 percent black and 37 percent Hispanic) across the 100 largest school districts. Plotts and Sable (2010).

[8]Eleven percent of students at the 100 largest school districts had special needs. Plotts and Sable (2010).

Diplomas Now

Table 2.2

**Characteristics of Diplomas Now Study Schools, Other Schools in
Study Districts, and Average Schools in the United States (2010-2011)**

Characteristic	Study Schools	Other Schools in Study Districts[a]	Average U.S. Schools[b]
Panel A: middle schools			
Eligible for Title I (%)	100.0	92.9	72.3 **
Students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch (%)	83.4	79.1	50.2 **
Race/ethnicity of students (%)			
Black	62.4	46.1 *	16.4 **
Hispanic	31.3	39.6	19.1 **
Asian	2.0	3.9	3.9
White	3.6	9.2 *	56.7 **
Other	0.7	1.3	3.8 *
Gender of students (%)			
Male	52.1	50.9	51.2
Average number of students	588.6	419.1 *	518.6
Average number of students in grade 6[c]	186.6	135.4	171.0
School setting[d] (%)			
City	87.9	88.6	24.7 **
Suburb	12.1	10.5	29.0 *
Town	0.0	0.1	14.8 *
Rural area	0.0	0.8	31.4 **
Average number of full-time teachers	42.5	38.0	38.4
Sample size	33	898	16,555

(continued)

comparison with the national average, the schools participating in the evaluation serve more low-income students and minority students, and are more likely to be located in urban areas. All of the schools participating in the evaluation are eligible for Title I, compared with 54 percent of high schools and 72 percent of middle schools across the country.[9] On average, 73 percent of

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[9]Title I is a program created by the United States Department of Education to distribute funding to schools and school districts with high percentages of low-income families. To be eligible for school-wide Title I, at least 40 percent of a school's students must be from low-income families.

Table 2.2 (continued)

Characteristic	Study Schools	Other Schools in Study Districts[a]	Average U.S. Schools[b]
Panel B: high schools			
Eligible for Title I (%)	100.0	93.1	54.1 **
Students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch (%)	73.2	72.0	41.0 **
Race/ethnicity of students (%)			
Black	58.1	38.3 **	16.3 **
Hispanic	32.7	46.5 *	16.2 **
Asian	4.7	4.7	4.2
White	4.0	8.9 *	60.3 **
Other	0.6	1.6	3.0 *
Gender of students (%)			
Male	52.3	49.6	50.9 *
Average number of students	1,438.8	1,291.3	1,204.5
Average number of students in grade 9	445.3	379.3	330.2 **
School setting[d] (%)			
City	82.8	85.4	22.3 **
Suburb	17.2	13.2	30.9
Town	0.0	0.0	17.4 *
Rural area	0.0	1.4	29.4 **
Average number of full-time teachers	78.9	68.8	70.7
Average promoting power[e]	56.0	65.8 *	80.9 **
Sample size	29	349	9,236

(continued)

students in study high schools and 83 percent of students in study middle schools are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, compared with national averages of 41 percent and 50 percent, respectively. Ninety-one percent of students in participating high schools and 94 percent of students in participating middle schools are black or Hispanic, while nationally only 33 percent of high school students and 36 percent of middle school students are black or Hispanic. Over three-quarters of study schools are identified as being located in urban areas, while nationally only about a quarter of schools are located in urban areas. The high schools participating in the study also have lower promoting power than the national average, suggesting that they are less

Table 2.2 (continued)

SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Sciences, Common Core of Data, "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data," 2010-2011 and 2007-2008.

NOTES: Four study schools, 22 schools in the "other schools in study districts" sample, and 2,798 schools in the "average U.S. schools" sample are missing data for "average number of students in grade 6" because they did not include sixth grades during the baseline year. Two middle schools and four high schools in the study schools sample are missing data on "average number of full-time teachers." One hundred and nineteen middle schools and 93 high schools are missing these data in the "other schools in study districts" sample, and 1,697 middle schools and 828 high schools are missing these data in the "average U.S. schools" sample. Nine middle schools and 13 high schools in the "other schools in study districts" sample are also missing data for "students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch," and 36 middle schools and 26 high schools in the "average U.S. schools" sample are missing data for this variable.

  A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the program group and the comparison groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent.

  Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

  [a]"Other schools in study districts" include all other nonstudy schools in the same school districts as the Diplomas Now study schools that met the "average U.S. schools" criteria below.

  [b]"Average U.S. schools" include non-Diplomas Now study middle schools that during 2010-2011 had more than 25 total seventh-grade students and 25 eighth-grade students and non-Diplomas Now study high schools that had more than 100 total ninth-grade students, and during 2007-2008 had at least 100 students in the ninth grade. "Average U.S. schools" are also defined as "regular" schools by the Common Core of Data, and are located within the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

  [c]Four schools in the "study schools" sample did not have sixth grades during the 2010-2011 school year and are excluded from this analysis. Schools with fewer than 25 sixth-grade students were also excluded from the other two samples.

  [d]A "city" is defined as a territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population greater than 100,000. A "suburb" is defined as a territory outside of a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population of less than 250,000.

  [e]"Promoting power" is calculated as the ratio of twelfth-grade students in 2010-2011 to ninth-grade students in 2007-2008.

likely to move students from ninth through twelfth grade on time.[10] The average promoting power for study high schools shows that 56 percent of ninth-grade students reach twelfth grade in three years, while the national average is over 80 percent.

As discussed above, the school districts participating in the study are generally large urban districts with high percentages of minority students. Schools participating in the evaluation are representative of the schools in these districts, with similarly high rates of eligibility for Title I and free or reduced-price lunches, similarly high rates of minority students, and slightly higher

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[10]"Promoting power" is calculated as the ratio of twelfth-grade students in 2010-2011 to ninth-grade students in 2007-2008.

percentages of black students. Since the Diplomas Now program sought to recruit schools serving students most at risk of dropping out, it is not surprising that high schools participating in the evaluation have a lower promoting power (56 percent) than the average across all high schools in participating districts (66 percent).

Table 2.3 compares DN and non-DN high schools and middle schools prior to program implementation (during the 2010-2011 school year) in a variety of dimensions, and shows that DN and non-DN schools are similar for most of them. An overall test of the differences between the DN and non-DN schools for all the baseline characteristics that appear in the table confirms that the groups are not systematically different from each other, as would be expected following random assignment. These baseline findings indicate that the non-DN group provides a convincing representation of what would have happened in the DN schools had they not implemented the intervention.

Programs at All Schools Prior to Diplomas Now Implementation

The Diplomas Now model brings together an intensive set of instructional, organizational, data-related, student-related, and professional-development components and is implemented at a school in a systematic format with a team of auxiliary staff members and volunteers. These model components and additional staff members enable the implementation of whole-school reforms, targeted interventions for struggling students, and intense interventions for the neediest students. To illuminate the structures, curricula, programming, services, and climate in the study schools prior to the implementation of Diplomas Now, and to determine whether any features similar to those of the Diplomas Now program existed in the study schools prior to the evaluation, teachers and administrators (principals and assistant principals) were surveyed early in the first year of the evaluation and asked about their experiences at the study schools during the prior school year.[11] Eighty-two percent of administrators and 78 percent of teachers participated in the survey.[12] Even given these high response rates in general, due to missing data 16 schools are not included in the analyses of the administrator surveys and 6 schools are not included in the analyses of the teacher surveys. Most schools

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[11]The timing of school recruitment, which happened in the spring and summer prior to implementation, made it impossible to survey teachers before implementation began. Surveys were administered in fall 2011 for first wave of schools and fall 2012 for the second wave of schools. Most of the survey items asked respondents about their experiences during the prior school year. Only teachers and administrators who were present at the study school during the previous school year were asked to answer these items.

[12]See Appendix B for detailed information on survey response rates.

Table 2.3

Characteristics of Study Schools, Overall and by School Level

Characteristic	DN Schools	Non-DN Schools	Estimated Difference	P-Value
Panel A: all schools				
Students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch (%)	80.6	79.5	1.1	0.620
Race/ethnicity of students[a] (%)				
Black	58.7	64.4	-5.7	0.202
Hispanic	34.4	25.9	8.5 *	0.018
Asian	3.1	4.4	-1.3	0.395
White	3.2	4.6	-1.4	0.207
Other	0.6	0.7	-0.1	0.814
Gender of students (%)				
Male	51.9	52.2	-0.3	0.904
Teacher experience (%)				
0-4 years teaching	25.6	19.2	6.4 **	0.008
5 or more years teaching	74.4	80.8	-6.4 **	0.008
Teacher education (highest degree) (%)				
Bachelor's	34.8	34.3	0.5	0.834
Master's or higher	65.2	65.7	-0.5	0.834
Teacher certification[a] (%)				
Advanced certificate or National Board Certification	16.6	15.2	1.3	0.587
Professional, regular, or standard state certificate	75.8	79.2	-3.4	0.157
Temporary, probationary, or other certificate	7.7	5.6	2.1 *	0.049
Sample size	32	30		
Panel B: middle schools				
Average school enrollment				
Grade 6	182.3	212.3	-30.1	0.227
Grade 7	189.1	248.5	-59.5	0.087
Grade 8	188.2	251.6	-63.4	0.093
Students proficient on state test (%)				
Grade 6 Math	42.5	41.5	1.0	0.800
Grade 6 English/language arts	37.2	38.2	-1.0	0.790
Grade 7 Math	44.3	43.3	1.0	0.758
Grade 7 English/language arts	43.4	41.3	2.0	0.628
Grade 8 Math	45.4	42.8	2.6	0.477
Grade 8 English/language arts	48.1	43.7	4.4	0.251
Sample size	17	16		

(continued)

Table 2.3 (continued)

Characteristic	DN Schools	Non-DN Schools	Estimated Difference	P-Value
Panel C: high schools				
Average school enrollment				
Grade 9	453.9	457.0	-3.1	0.941
Grade 10	390.0	408.9	-18.9	0.645
Grade 11	322.5	315.6	6.9	0.849
Grade 12	312.1	301.6	10.6	0.781
Students proficient on state test[b] (%)				
English/language arts	43.1	50.3	-7.2 *	0.047
Math	40.4	45.1	-4.7	0.204
Average promoting power[c] (%)	57.6	52.6	5.0	0.349
Sample size	15	14		

SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Sciences, Common Core of Data, "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data," 2010-2011, state achievement test data, 2010-2011. Baseline surveys of administrators (principals and assistant principals) and teachers administered during the school year of 2011-2012 (for wave 1 schools) and 2012-2013 (for wave 2 schools).

NOTES: For teacher experience, teacher education, and teacher certification, data for one DN and two non-DN schools are missing. Sixth-grade average school enrollment data and sixth-grade math and English/language arts state test proficiency data are missing for two DN and two non-DN schools that did not include sixth grades during the baseline year.

    Difference estimates are regression-adjusted, controlling for the blocking of random assignment. A two-tailed t-test is used for all statistical tests presented in this table. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent.

    Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

    [a]A chi-squared test was used to determine whether there is a difference between DN and non-DN schools for the combined race/ethnicity categories and teacher certification categories. The p-value for the combined race/ethnicity categories was 0.124 and the p-value for the teacher certification categories was 0.037.

    [b]High school state achievement proficiency information is taken from the statewide math and English/language arts tests given in the highest grade.

    [c]"Promoting power" is calculated as the ratio of twelfth-grade students in 2010-2011 to ninth-grade students in 2007-2008.

were removed from the analyses because none of the administrators or teachers who participated in the survey were present at the school the year before.[13]

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[13]The 16 schools dropped from the administrator survey analyses include: 1) 8 schools where none of the administrators who responded to the survey were present during the prior year, 2) 5 schools that were in a random assignment block where all of the DN schools or all of the non-DN schools were dropped due to

(continued)

Tables 2.4 through 2.7 compare the percentages of administrators and teachers in the DN and non-DN schools who responded affirmatively about their schools having specific structural, curricular, or cultural features similar to those that make up the Diplomas Now model. Each table is aligned with one of the Four Pillars of the Diplomas Now model: Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities (Table 2.4), Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development (Table 2.5), Tiered Student Supports (Table 2.6), and a Can-Do Culture and Climate (Table 2.7).

These tables tell two stories. First, they compare DN and non-DN schools prior to Diplomas Now implementation to assess whether there were any major differences between them in certain important domains of the Diplomas Now program. Across administrator and teacher responses, there are no statistically significant differences between the DN and non-DN schools, suggesting that the two sets of schools were similar at the start of the evaluation in their adoption of structural and programmatic features like those of the Diplomas Now model.

Second, they also reveal whether, in general, features similar to those of the Diplomas Now program existed at the study schools prior to Diplomas Now implementation. Overall, these tables suggest that some structures, practices, and processes similar to those in the Diplomas Now model did take place in a majority of study schools prior to the evaluation. That is, the schools in the study were not "blank slates," but were in many cases attempting some curricular, structural, or programmatic reforms similar to those associated with the Diplomas Now model. For example, a majority of study school administrators reported that services for students were offered prior to program implementation, including individual and group counseling, enrichment and academic services provided during an extended school day, and credit-recovery or remedial courses for struggling high school students. Still, since most of the survey items only ask generally about school structures and components and do not detail the frequency or duration of activities, it is hard to judge the scale and quality at which these components were being implemented, or whether they were implemented in a format similar to that of the Diplomas Now model. It is also not clear from these findings whether schools were implementing these program components as part of a coordinated and systematic school-wide reform like the Diplomas Now model.

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missing data (since there was no comparison, the entire random assignment block was dropped); and 3) 3 schools where data were lost after collection. The 6 schools dropped from the teacher survey analyses include: 1) 2 schools where none of the teachers who responded to the survey were present during the prior year, 2) 1 school that was in a random assignment block where all of the DN schools or all of the non-DN schools were dropped due to missing data, and 3) 3 schools where data were lost after collection.

Table 2.4

**Pillar I: Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities,
Baseline Administrator and Teacher Survey Responses**

Survey Item	DN Schools (%)	Non-DN Schools (%)	Estimated Difference	P-Value
Panel A: administrators				
My school was subdivided into distinct organizational units (for example, schools-within-a-school, thematic academies or small learning communities).[a]	56.7	65.4	-8.7	0.507
The majority of courses were extended periods (70 or more minutes).	61.3	68.1	-6.8	0.478
Classes were organized in a 4x4 +1 block schedule (4 extended learning periods and 1 enrichment elective). *(high school only)*[b]	40.2	31.9	8.3	0.586
Sample size	24	22		
Panel B: teachers				
Most core classes taught were extended periods.	52.4	61.0	-8.6	0.299
Core teachers reported collaborating with an interdisciplinary team of other teachers who shared the same group of students weekly.	32.7	38.8	-6.1	0.230
Math and English/language arts teachers reported participating in a professional learning community with teachers from the same subject areas weekly.	34.8	43.5	-8.6	0.119
Sample size	30	26		

SOURCES: Baseline surveys of administrators (principals and assistant principals) and teachers administered during the school years of 2011-2012 (for wave 1 schools) and 2012-2013 (for wave 2 schools). Due to missing data, 6 schools have been dropped from the analysis of teacher survey data and 16 schools have been dropped from the analysis of administrator survey data.

NOTES: The values in the column labeled "DN schools" are the averages across schools of the percentage of administrators or teachers at each DN school who answered each item in the affirmative. The values in the column labeled "non-DN schools" are the regression-adjusted averages. The estimated differences are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for blocking of random assignment by school.

   "Core" academic areas are identified as math, English/language arts, sciences, and social studies.

   A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the program group and the comparison group. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent.

   Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

   [a]One additional school is missing data for this item.

   [b]There are 12 DN high schools and 11 non-DN high schools.

Table 2.5

Pillar II: Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development, Baseline Administrator and Teacher Survey Responses

Survey Item	DN Schools (%)	Non-DN Schools (%)	Estimated Difference	P-Value
Panel A: administrators				
Students participated in college preparation curricula in core academic areas. *(high school only)* [a]	94.2	98.8	-4.6	0.206
Struggling students were offered opportunities for course recovery or were provided with remedial classes to enable them to catch up to their peers. *(high school only)* [a]	96.5	98.1	-1.6	0.592
Principals had the opportunity to participate in a principal/leader support network.	84.4	92.1	-7.7	0.205
Sample size	24	22		
Panel B: teachers				
Math and English/language arts teachers reported receiving weekly instructional coaching from a school teacher (a peer coach, mentor, or math or English/language arts facilitator).	43.1	51.2	-8.1	0.061
Math and English/language arts teachers reported that students in their classes were engaged in different learning activities at the same time at least weekly.	65.8	60.7	5.0	0.174
Math and English/language arts teachers reported that their lessons included applications to real-life issues at least weekly.	81.5	79.6	1.9	0.546
Sample size	30	26		

(continued)

Some important components of the Diplomas Now model were less likely than others to be reported in a majority of schools prior to program implementation. For example, fewer than half of the teachers reported participating in interdisciplinary teams and professional learning communities, and few teachers reported having extensive volunteer assistance in their classrooms like that offered by the City Year corps members in the Diplomas Now model.

On average, a majority of the administrators surveyed indicated that activities, structures, and practices similar to those in the Diplomas Now model were going on at their schools

Table 2.5 (continued)

NOTES: The values in the column labeled "DN schools" are the school-level averages of the percentage of administrators or teachers at each DN school who answered each item in the affirmative. The values in the column labeled "non-DN schools" are the regression-adjusted averages. The estimated differences are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for blocking of random assignment by school.

   "Core" academic areas are identified as math, English/language arts, sciences, and social studies.

   A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the program group and the comparison group. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent.

   Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

   [a]There are 12 DN high schools and 11 non-DN high schools.

prior to Diplomas Now implementation.[14] This is most noticeable in Pillar II (Table 2.5), where almost all administrators at a school, on average, indicated that all students at their high schools participated in college prep curricula in core content areas, and that struggling students were offered opportunities for course recovery or were provided remedial classes to enable them to catch up to their peers. Although it is not possible to gauge the quality of the preevaluation curricula at these schools, it is important to note that most schools were already making efforts to focus on a college prep curriculum and offer remedial course work to students falling behind.

It is notable, however, that in Table 2.4, fewer than half of the administrators at DN high schools and non-DN high schools suggested that their schools had classes organized in a 4x4 +1 block schedule that allowed for four extended learning periods for core subjects and one enrichment elective course. The Diplomas Now team views this organizational structure as essential to successful curricular delivery, particularly for remedial course work in the ninth grade. This suggests that although study high schools may already have had some remedial course offerings for their students, they were probably organized differently from those in Diplomas Now schools, and they may not have offered the same kind of accelerated learning as the double-dose offerings of math and English/language arts provided to Diplomas Now students testing more than one year behind grade level in these subjects.

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[14]To capture better how administrators responded across the entire survey, the research team created a composite measure that includes all 11 administrator measures in Tables 2.4 through 2.7 where both middle and high school administrators participated. On average across all DN and all non-DN schools, a majority of administrators at each school responded to 69 percent of the 11 items affirmatively.

Table 2.6

**Pillar III: Tiered Student Supports,
Baseline Administrator and Teacher Survey Responses**

Survey Item	DN Schools (%)	Non-DN Schools (%)	Estimated Difference	P-Value
Panel A: administrators				
Individual, group, and family counseling services were all available at the school.	60.1	67.1	-7.0	0.566
Students were provided with clothing, school supplies, food, and health and wellness activities as needed.	62.9	79.6	-16.7	0.102
Students participated in academic and enrichment programs through an extended school day.	72.6	68.7	3.9	0.727
A school-wide behavior management system existed at the school.[a]	35.9	37.7	-1.8	0.871
Sample size	24	22		
Panel B: teachers				
Interdisciplinary teams reviewed data on individual students' academic progress, course performance, attendance, and behavior to identify students' needs and determine appropriate responses.	49.9	52.5	-2.5	0.573
Math and English/language arts teachers reported volunteers worked with students in at least some of their classes on a daily basis.	15.5	10.2	5.3	0.226
Core teachers reported arranging for intensive support and interventions for students by making appropriate referrals as needed.	80.7	76.6	4.1	0.164
Sample size	30	26		

(continued)

As shown in Table 2.6, most school administrators did report that prior to the evaluation, schools were offering students counseling and other health and wellness services and some academic and enrichment programming before or after normal school hours. It is worth noting that Communities In Schools was being fully implemented in at least five study schools (two program and three control schools) during the year prior to Diplomas Now implementation. The

Table 2.6 (continued)

SOURCES: Baseline surveys of administrators (principals and assistant principals) and teachers administered during the school years of 2011-2012 (for wave 1 schools) and 2012-2013 (for wave 2 schools). Due to missing data, 6 schools have been dropped from the analysis of teacher survey data and 16 schools have been dropped from the analysis of administrator survey data.

NOTES: The values in the column labeled "DN schools" are the school-level averages of the percentage of administrators or teachers at each DN school who answered each item in the affirmative. The values in the column labeled "non-DN schools" are the regression-adjusted averages. The estimated differences are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for blocking of random assignment by school.

   "Core" academic areas are identified as math, English/language arts, sciences, and social studies.

   A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the program group and the comparison group. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent.

   Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

   [a]This measure is the average of the following items: teachers consistently enforced rules for student behavior in their classrooms; teachers helped maintain discipline in the entire school, not just their own classrooms (for example, by helping students transition between classes); the school had an effective system for providing positive reinforcement to students who met behavior expectations; the school had an effective system for responding to problem behaviors; students received instruction and guidance on school discipline policies and procedures; educators conducted functional assessments and implemented individual behavior plans; and students with frequently disruptive behavior received daily check-ins with adults to monitor their progress in meeting behavior goals.

organization also had relationships with at least six other schools (three program and three control schools) where program components were being provided to subsets of students.[15]

Just over a third of administrators at DN and non-DN schools reported that their schools had school-wide behavior management systems with components similar to those the Diplomas Now model promotes. Managing student behavior and offering assistance to students with social (as well as academic) needs is of particular importance to the Diplomas Now model.

Finally, although administrators reported that their schools might include some components similar to those in Diplomas Now, as shown in Table 2.7 fewer than half of them at DN and non-DN schools reported any kind of externally developed reform model being used prior to Diplomas Now implementation. Still, most administrators in DN and non-DN schools indicated that they had staff members designated to coordinate school reform efforts, intensive individual interventions, and community resources.

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[15]The study team was unable to confirm the baseline presence or absence of Communities In Schools in 12 of the 62 study sample schools.

Table 2.7

Pillar IV: Can-Do Culture and Climate, Baseline Administrator and Teacher Survey Responses

Survey Item	DN Schools (%)	Non-DN Schools (%)	Estimated Difference	P-Value
Panel A: administrators				
My school used an externally developed school reform model.	49.7	46.1	3.6	0.739
A designated adult at the school was in charge of coordinating school reform efforts.	73.0	63.4	9.6	0.385
A designated adult at the school was in charge of coordinating intensive interventions and community resources.[a]	69.3	75.8	-6.5	0.481
Parents/guardians and community members were involved in school activities, helped make school decisions, and supported school reform efforts.	46.7	60.1	-13.4	0.200
Sample size	24	22		
Panel B: teachers				
Teachers were involved in decisions about school policies, supported school reform efforts, and in general, had positive morale.	35.9	40.4	-4.5	0.284
The environment at the school was conducive to teaching and learning.	53.1	57.1	-4.0	0.418
Students were respectful to peers and teachers, maintained academic integrity, took responsibility for their own learning, paid attention, and did their schoolwork.[b]	25.9	28.8	-2.9	0.363
Sample size	30	26		

In contrast to the administrators surveyed, teachers were generally less likely to indicate that structures and programs similar to the Diplomas Now model's components existed at their schools prior to Diplomas Now implementation.[16] For example, one important structural

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[16]To capture better how teachers responded across the multiple items, the research team created a composite measure that combines all 12 teacher measures in Tables 2.4 through 2.7. On average across all DN schools, a majority of teachers at each school responded affirmatively to 48 percent of the 12 items, and on

Table 2.7 (continued)

NOTES: The values in the column labeled "DN schools" are the school-level averages of the percentage of administrators or teachers at each DN school who answered each item in the affirmative. The values in the column labeled "non-DN schools" are the regression-adjusted averages. The estimated differences are regression-adjusted using ordinary least squares, controlling for blocking of random assignment by school.

   "Core" academic areas are identified as math, English/language arts, sciences, and social studies.

   A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the program group and the comparison group. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: ** = 1 percent; * = 5 percent.

   Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in calculating sums and differences.

   [a]One additional school is missing data for this item.

   [b]This measure is the average of the following items: students communicated with their peers in a respectful manner most of the time; students communicated with me in a respectful manner most of the time; students took responsibility for their own learning most of the time; students maintained academic integrity on tests or written assignments most of the time; students appeared to take pride in their schoolwork most of the time; students put forth effort to understand difficult materials most of the time; students appeared to pay attention during my instruction most of the time; students remained on task during self-directed activities most of the time; and students completed their assignments most of the time.

component of the Diplomas Now model's tiered system is for interdisciplinary teams of teachers sharing the same group of students to be given consistent and ample time to collaborate. As shown in Table 2.4, only about a third of teachers reported collaborating at least weekly with an interdisciplinary team of teachers who shared the same group of students. Similarly, fewer than half the teachers at DN and non-DN schools reported participating at least weekly in professional learning communities with teachers who shared their subject areas. For Diplomas Now, this is an important structural component of peer coaching and professional development, since much of Diplomas Now's coaching is delivered through these professional learning community meetings. As shown in Table 2.5, 43 percent of teachers at DN schools and 51 percent of teachers at non-DN schools reported receiving weekly instructional coaching prior to Diplomas Now.

While an important feature of the Diplomas Now program is the City Year corps that works directly with students inside and outside the classroom, as shown in Table 2.6 few teachers reported that volunteers were regularly working in their classrooms prior to Diplomas Now. This suggests that the additional classroom support provided by City Year was not a part

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average across all non-DN schools, a majority of teachers at each school responded affirmatively to 51 percent of the 12 items. The difference between DN and non-DN teachers is not statistically significant.

of most study schools prior to the evaluation. In a few cases, City Year was already active in schools prior to the full Diplomas Now implementation. City Year was active in 8 of the 62 study schools (5 program and 3 control schools) during the year before Diplomas Now.

A majority of teachers did report engaging in some of the practices that Diplomas Now promotes for teachers. Teachers at most study schools reported that they were engaging students in different learning activities and using lessons with real-life applications on a regular basis, as shown in Table 2.5. Teachers also reported that they were arranging for intensive support for students by making appropriate referrals (Table 2.6), with 81 percent of DN schools' teachers and 77 percent of non-DN schools' teachers saying that they did so. Still, teachers did not tend to report that their schools had the "can-do culture and climate" that Diplomas Now works to promote. Fewer than half of the teachers at DN and non-DN schools reported that they were involved in decisions about school policies, supported reforms, and felt the morale of the staff was positive. Only a quarter of teachers reported that students at their school were respectful to teachers and each other, and took responsibility for their learning and schoolwork most of the time.

Summary

The Diplomas Now model is designed to meet the needs of urban secondary schools with high concentrations of high-needs students, and the schools ultimately recruited for the Diplomas Now i3 evaluation fit these characteristics. The DN and non-DN groups of schools are comparable across a broad range of baseline student characteristics and structural and programmatic components. Administrators and teachers reported that prior to the evaluation a majority of study schools were making efforts to provide some services similar to those found in the Diplomas Now model, suggesting that many study schools were attempting structural, curricular, and programmatic reforms prior to Diplomas Now implementation. But it is less clear whether those services were of the same scale or quality as those in the Diplomas Now model. In some instances, the Diplomas Now teams at DN schools may have been able to capitalize on having structural or curricular reforms similar to those of the Diplomas Now model already in place. For example, since structural changes such as reorganizing the class and period schedule and the length of classes can be particularly difficult for a school to implement quickly, middle schools that already had extended periods or high schools that already had 4x4 block scheduling may have benefited from the presence of these structures in implementing Diplomas Now. But in other instances, having a certain type of reform in place may not have benefited the Diplomas Now teams at the DN schools if the reform was not closely aligned with that of the DN model, or if it had not been well received or well implemented in past years. Chapter 3 will focus on the DN schools during the first year of implementation of the program and discuss how successful they were in implementing the features of the Diplomas Now model.

Chapter 3

Fidelity of Implementation of Diplomas Now

The Diplomas Now model proposes that whole-school organizational and instructional reforms and targeted student support create a school climate that is conducive to good teaching and learning and that inspires students to attend, behave, and try. This chapter focuses on the fidelity of implementation of the Diplomas Now model, drawing on annual data collection from the full sample of 32 schools implementing Diplomas Now (DN schools), which consists of 17 middle schools and 15 high schools. Fidelity of implementation is defined as the extent to which schools implemented the Diplomas Now logic model inputs (see Figure 1.1). The research team measured fidelity of implementation in two ways: (1) implementation of all the inputs and (2) implementation of the specific aspects of the model deemed most critical by the Diplomas Now Implementation Support Team, a team of national-level representatives from the three partner organizations.

This chapter offers several main takeaways and lessons:

- During the first year of implementation, on average DN schools implemented a majority (61 percent) of the program components across the nine program inputs. In all, 111 separate program components were defined and measured in collaboration with the Implementation Support Team. Overall, this may suggest that implementation of the model had traction in DN schools by the end of the first year. Given the complexity of the model, it is not surprising that full implementation did not happen in a single year.

- However, during the first year of implementation, none of the schools in the study were able to adequately implement all of the components that the Implementation Support Team identified as critical to success. Only half of the schools were able to achieve a rating of "moderate" implementation in the areas considered most critical by Diplomas Now, while the rest of the schools were rated as achieving "low" implementation. None of the schools reached the "solid" or "high" implementation rating.

- DN schools were most successful during the first year in implementing a tiered intervention model and adding student support services like tutoring and after-school programs into the existing school structure. These are key components of Diplomas Now efforts to identify and support students who are falling off track.

- DN schools were less successful in adopting new curricula and implementing peer coaching models. Both of these require the trust and investment of school administrators and teachers, and may therefore require additional time to implement.

- At DN schools, the influx of staff members from Talent Development Secondary, City Year, and Communities In Schools (that is, the implementation of the Integrated On-Site Support input) contributed substantially to the implementation of other inputs. However, lack of clarity surrounding the roles and responsibilities of Diplomas Now staff members may have hindered some aspects of implementation during the first year.

The following sections of this chapter discuss data sources, methods and analyses, and the implementation fidelity findings.

Data Sources

Primary data for this implementation study came from program staff surveys of all 32 DN schools in both wave 1 (2011–2012) and wave 2 (2012–2013).[1] The Diplomas Now program staff surveys serve as the basis for determining fidelity and calculating the fidelity metrics. In addition, the study team fielded school administrator and teacher surveys in all 32 DN schools and visited 7 of them to gather more in-depth, qualitative case-study data through individual interviews and focus groups. The school administrator and teacher surveys, and the interview and focus-group data, are considered secondary sources that provide additional context to the Diplomas Now program staff survey findings.

The *Diplomas Now program staff surveys* were developed in collaboration with the Implementation Support Team and specifically target the components within each input to measure the fidelity of their implementation. The following four surveys were administered to program staff members from each of the Diplomas Now partner organizations (see Chapter 1 for a description of each partner organization) at the culmination of the first implementation year:

1. The Implementation Support Team was asked about each school's participation in the Diplomas Now summer institute, in-service training for program staff members, and the kick-off planning sessions and meetings.

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[1]Diplomas Now staff members collected program documents, databases, and service records to supplement the program staff surveys.

2. The school transformation facilitator, who coordinates school reform efforts, answered questions regarding student learning environments, the school curriculum, tiered intervention support, family and community involvement, and the presence and activities of curricular support staff members, such as the instructional coaches.

3. The City Year program manager, who manages the City Year corps at a school, was asked about the corps' staffing and activities, such as tutoring schedules and after-school activities.

4. The Communities In Schools site coordinator, responsible for intensive interventions, answered questions about the presence, start time, and certification of the site coordinator, and about collaboration with Diplomas Now program partners.

School administrator and teacher surveys were also collected during the spring of each year. These surveys were administered to principals, assistant principals, and teachers to provide supporting data about Diplomas Now implementation from their perspectives.[2] Administrator and teacher surveys covered topics related to early program outcomes, such as school climate and relationships among various stakeholders, but also covered aspects of school programs aligned with the Diplomas Now model, thereby yielding information about Diplomas Now implementation and fidelity (see the *Data Collection Instrument Supplement* for sample school administrator and teacher surveys).[3] Administrator surveys were collected from 31 DN schools, for a total of 94 respondents. Sixth- and ninth-grade teacher surveys were collected from all 32 DN schools, for a total of 742 respondents. (See Appendix Table B.1 for more details on the respondents.)

Interviews and focus groups conducted during qualitative case-study research at seven DN schools in four school districts were designed to dig deeper into the processes and interactions that facilitate or constrain the implementation of the Diplomas Now model. The Implementation Support Team helped the research team purposefully select case-study middle schools and high schools to represent different geographic regions of the country and diverse experiences with Diplomas Now implementation. Interview and focus-group protocols were developed and tailored to the role of each respondent group, based on the Diplomas Now logic

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[2]Although survey data were collected from all teachers in every school, because Diplomas Now makes a priority of services to the sixth and ninth grades, the analyses of staff surveys focused on teachers of those grades. Additionally, specific attention was given to sixth- and ninth-grade teachers of core courses (that is, English/language arts, math, social studies, and science).

[3]The *Data Collection Instrument Supplement* to this report, Corrin et al. (2014), is available at www.mdrc.org.

model (Figure 1.1) and a set of research questions (see the *Data Collection Instrument Supplement* for sample protocols):[4]

- How is Diplomas Now implemented across case-study schools?

- What factors facilitated implementation of the model, and what factors hindered implementation?

- What are the perceived benefits of the Diplomas Now model in case-study schools?

- What were the drawbacks to implementing the Diplomas Now model?

- What lessons can be learned from the implementation of Diplomas Now in case-study schools?

Data collected from these seven schools included 49 interviews and 28 focus groups with a total of 173 participants. Individual interviews were conducted with school-based staff members (for example, school transformation facilitators, City Year program managers and team leaders, Communities In Schools site coordinators, instructional coaches, school administrators, and school counselors) and district-based staff members (for example, Diplomas Now instructional facilitators, field managers, school and student support services facilitators, Implementation Support Team representatives, and school district leaders). Focus groups were conducted with parents, students, teachers, and City Year corps members. (See Appendix Table C.1 for the number and type of respondents by school.)

Methods and Analysis

Measuring Diplomas Now Fidelity of Implementation

"Fidelity of implementation" focuses on the extent to which DN schools implemented the model inputs as intended, considering both the Diplomas Now model in its entirety and those aspects of it deemed most critical by the Implementation Support Team. Other than the Program Staff Training and Development input, the inputs align with the Four Pillars (Teacher Teams and Smaller Learning Communities, Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development, Tiered Student Supports, and Can-Do Culture and Climate). Each of the nine inputs consists of a set of more specific components identified by the Implementation Support Team. Given the complexity of the Diplomas Now model and school-wide reform, a total of 111 components were identified under the nine Diplomas Now inputs, based on their importance in the context of the logic model as assessed by the Implementation Support Team. For

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[4]Corrin et al. (2014).

each component, the evaluation team and the Implementation Support Team designed a fidelity scale to determine adequate implementation fidelity.[5] The fidelity of implementation matrix (see Appendix Table B.2) contains the inputs, their components, the components' operational definitions, and the components' fidelity scales.

As noted previously, the Implementation Support Team determined that a subset of the inputs and components were critical to successful implementation of the Diplomas Now model.[6] It defined critical inputs and components as those that DN schools would have to implement adequately (as defined by the fidelity scales) in order to successfully implement the Diplomas Now model as a whole. It identified six of the nine inputs as critical and 62 of the 111 components (across all nine inputs) as critical. Table 3.1 lists all of the Diplomas Now inputs and identifies those considered critical.[7] As Table 3.1 shows, the nine inputs vary widely both in their number of components and in the number of components identified as critical. In addition, the complexity of individual components may also vary. Although an input with more components or more critical components may be more challenging to implement, it is likely that other factors also contribute to the ease or difficulty with which a school implements a given input. Explanations of some of these factors should emerge over the course of the evaluation.

Two Metrics for Measurement of Fidelity

Two metrics are used to measure fidelity of implementation: a continuous score and a categorical rating.

1. The continuous score examines all nine inputs and 111 components and estimates how much or how "*fully*" schools implemented the Diplomas Now model.

2. The categorical rating focuses on the critical inputs and critical components, and assesses how well the DN schools implemented those aspects of the model considered most important by the Implementation Support Team.

The score and the rating provide complementary assessments of fidelity, one measuring the overall implementation of the Diplomas Now model, and the other measuring the implementation of the specific aspects of the Diplomas Now model identified as most important by the Implementation Support Team.

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[5]This is the first time the Diplomas Now partners have implemented an assessment of Diplomas Now program fidelity. As such, the validity of critical inputs and components have not been tested, nor have the thresholds for assessing the adequacy of implementation. Both may require future revisions.

[6]Although the Implementation Support Team identified critical inputs and components, and may have guided schools to focus on these items, the list of critical and noncritical components was not shared with Diplomas Now school-based staff members, teachers, or administrators.

[7]Appendix Table B.2 lists all components, including those deemed noncritical.

Diplomas Now

Table 3.1

Diplomas Now Inputs and Components Identified as Critical

Model Inputs	Critical Input	Number of Components	Number of Critical Components
Pillar I. Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities			
Strong Learning Environments[a]	Yes	6	5
Pillar II. Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development			
Curriculum for College Readiness	No	24	4
Professional Development and Peer Coaching[a]	Yes	5	2
Pillar III. Tiered Student Supports			
Tiered Intervention Model[a]	Yes	3	2
Student Supports[a]	Yes	24	19
Student Case Management[a]	Yes	14	5
Pillar IV. Can-Do Culture and Climate			
Integrated On-Site Support[a]	Yes	11	9
Family and Community Involvement	No	6	1
Program Staff Training and Development	No	18	15

SOURCE: Diplomas Now fidelity of implementation matrix 2013.

NOTE: [a]Strong Learning Environments, Curriculum for College Readiness, and Professional Development and Peer Coaching include components specific to middle school or high school.

Independently, each measure provides useful but different information; taken together, they provide flexibility in understanding implementation, allow for detailed discussion of fidelity, and help to shape the implementation story. For example, instances where the continuous score and categorical rating are consistent could indicate steady implementation across all aspects of the model; low scores and high ratings might indicate that schools made a priority of critical aspects of the model; and high scores and low ratings might suggest that many aspects of the model were implemented, but that schools had difficulty in implementing some of the more critical aspects.

The *continuous score* reflects all inputs and components of the Diplomas Now model. A score ranging from 0 to 1 is calculated for each input, based on its components. (Within each input the components are standardized, because fidelity scales and criteria for components vary.) The average of the scores for all inputs is a school's continuous score. The continuous score therefore represents the proportion of Diplomas Now components implemented at a

school, and provides flexibility in that it credits schools for partially implemented components. The continuous scores for all schools are then averaged to produce an overall continuous score.

To illustrate fidelity calculations, Table 3.2 presents an excerpt from the fidelity matrix, highlighting the input Strong Learning Environments and its high school components, the scales and criteria for assessing adequate fidelity, and sample responses from a hypothetical school.[8] One can calculate a continuous score for Strong Learning Environments using Table 3.2. First, the components are standardized to a 0-to-1 scale (for example, a component scaled from 0 to 2 is recoded so that $0 = 0$, $1 = 0.5$, and $2 = 1$) and then averaged together. In this example, there are five components of the Strong Learning Environments input: small learning communities, interdisciplinary teams, Diplomas Now site-based meetings, Diplomas Now site-based collaboration, and 4x4 block scheduling. The average of the fidelity scale responses for these components equals 0.46 (that is, $1 + 0.8 + 0 + 0.5 + 0$, divided by 5). This is the school's continuous score for Strong Learning Environments. Scores for the remaining inputs are calculated similarly, and the average of all input scores provides the school's continuous score. The average of continuous scores from all schools provides an overall continuous score that estimates what proportion of the Diplomas Now model (from 0 to 1) was implemented across all DN schools during the first year.

The *categorical rating* focuses on the implementation of critical inputs and critical components. The rating seeks to show how schools are implementing those components deemed most important to the model by the Implementation Support Team. Specifically, the categorical rating addresses six critical inputs and 62 critical components and assigns each DN school one of four ratings:

1. Low: successful implementation of fewer than three critical inputs

2. Moderate: successful implementation of at least three critical inputs

3. Solid: successful implementation of at least five critical inputs

4. High: successful implementation of eight or more inputs, including at least five critical inputs

In order to be considered successful on an individual input, model implementation at a school must meet the implementation adequacy thresholds for *all* of the components identified as critical. This is the case regardless of the school's success with the other components of that

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[8]Strong Learning Environments consists of six components: four that apply to middle and high schools, one that applies solely to middle schools, and one that applies solely to high schools.

Table 3.2

**Example of a Diplomas Now Program Model Input, Related Components, and Fidelity Measures:
Strong Learning Environments**

Component	Operational Definition	Fidelity Scale[a]	Criterion for Adequacy	Sample Response for Hypothetical School
Small learning communities	Interdisciplinary teams of teachers who work with the same small group of students	0: No 1: Yes	1: Adequate	1: Yes
Interdisciplinary teacher team meetings	Meetings where interdisciplinary core teachers discuss shared students	0: Do not/rarely occur 0.2: Occur monthly 0.4: Occur biweekly 0.6: Occur weekly 0.8: Occur multiple times a week 1: Occur daily	0.5: Adequate	0.8: Occur multiple times a week
Site-based team standards	Site-based team (administrator, school transformation facilitator, project manager, and site coordinator) standards for collaboration, communication, and decision making	0: No 0.5: Partially/in process 1: In place	0.5: Adequate	0.5: Partially/in progress
Site-based team meetings	Brief meetings for site-based team to review program implementation (approx. 30 minutes)	0: Once a month or less 0.5: Biweekly 1: Weekly or more frequently	0.5: Adequate	0: Once a month or less
4x4 block (high school only)	4 class periods of 75 to 90 minutes that meet daily (or at least 4 days a week)	0: No 0.5: Hybrid/acceptable alternative 1: Yes	0.5: Adequate	0: No

(continued)

Table 3.2 (continued)

SOURCE: Diplomas Now fidelity of implementation matrix 2013.

NOTES: This table only provides Strong Learning Environments components that apply to high schools. One middle school-specific component of Strong Learning Environments has been omitted.

[a]Scales have been standardized to assist with the calculation of implementation metrics.

input, regardless of the reason the component was not implemented (for example, district policies and procedures), and whether or not the component was partially implemented.

As shown in Table 3.2, there are five components of Strong Learning Environments applicable to high schools. The Implementation Support Team identified four of these as critical to Diplomas Now implementation: small learning communities, interdisciplinary teams, Diplomas Now site-based meetings, and 4x4 block scheduling.

Considering the example depicted in Table 3.2, this school met the criteria for adequate implementation for small learning communities (that is, teams of teachers work with the same small groups of students) and frequency of interdisciplinary team meetings (that is, occurring multiple times a week), but not for frequency of Diplomas Now site-based meetings (that is, biweekly) or 4x4 classroom blocks (that is, a hybrid schedule or acceptable alternative). Since implementation at the school did not achieve adequate fidelity to the model for all of this input's critical components, this school would not be considered successful on the Strong Learning Environments input. Conducting a similar process on the remaining eight inputs would provide a final count of the number of inputs successfully implemented, leading to a categorical rating for each school.

Overall Implementation Fidelity

As noted in Chapter 2, baseline findings suggest that many schools were already familiar with or practicing reforms similar to those Diplomas Now offers, which may have positively or negatively affected implementation fidelity at some schools. For example, schools may have benefited if they already had structural components in place like daily schedules with four extended periods. Alternatively, schools may have encountered challenges in adopting new curricula that conflicted with their existing ones. The evaluation's current data-collection plan does not allow for deeper analysis of these two possibilities. It is important to underscore, however, that the schools already implementing activities similar to Diplomas Now were not implementing the comprehensive Diplomas Now model, which depends on the coordination of practices, a systematic approach, and the identification and timely support of at-risk students.

Table 3.3 provides summative first-year fidelity findings across all DN schools, separated by middle and high schools. First-year continuous score results indicate that DN schools implemented a majority of Diplomas Now components, with an overall average continuous score of 0.61 (ranging from 0.39 to 0.76 for individual schools, with a standard deviation of 0.11). Turning to the model inputs considered most important by Diplomas Now leaders, 50 percent of schools received a "low" categorical rating and 50 percent received a "moderate" rating. DN schools ranged from successfully implementing none of the critical inputs (one

Diplomas Now

Table 3.3

Summative First-Year Fidelity of Implementation,
Findings Among Diplomas Now Schools

Characteristic	All DN Schools	DN Middle Schools	DN High Schools
Fidelity of implementation continuous score			
Overall score	0.61	0.63	0.59
Fidelity of implementation categorical rating (%)			
Low implementation	50.0	52.9	46.7
Successful on no critical inputs	3.1	5.9	0.0
Successful on at least 1 critical input	25.0	17.6	33.3
Successful on at least 2 critical inputs	21.9	29.4	13.3
Moderate implementation	50.0	47.1	53.3
Successful on at least 3 critical inputs	34.4	29.4	40.0
Successful on at least 4 critical inputs	15.6	17.6	13.3
Solid implementation	0.0	0.0	0.0
Successful on at least 5 critical inputs	0.0	0.0	0.0
Sample size	32	17	15

SOURCES: Diplomas Now fidelity of implementation program staff surveys, spring 2012 and 2013.

NOTE: For the categorical rating, schools are considered successful on a given input if they adequately implemented all of its components considered critical to the Diplomas Now model.

school) to successfully implementing four of the six critical inputs (five schools). The continuous score of 0.61 suggests that, on average, model implementation had some traction during the first year. Still, the accompanying low and moderate categorical ratings show that even though on average the study schools were implementing a majority of the components, none of the schools were able to meet the standards set by the Implementation Support Team for "solid" implementation of the model because they did not adequately implement all of the components deemed critical to successful implementation. There were no significant differences between middle and high schools or between wave 1 and wave 2 schools.

Input-Level Implementation Fidelity

Tables 3.4 and 3.5 categorize the nine model inputs by pillar, and provide continuous scores and categorical ratings for each input. Table 3.4 provides continuous scores that represent the average proportion of all components implemented for each input across all schools. These continuous scores suggest that DN schools had the most success implementing Tiered Student Supports (Pillar III) and the greatest difficulty implementing Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development (Pillar II) in the first year of the program. The continuous scores also reveal that among the inputs, DN schools were most successful in implementing Integrated On-Site Support (0.82) and two Pillar III inputs, Tiered Intervention Model (0.76) and Student Supports (0.72). Taken together, this means that Diplomas Now was most successful at combining data-driven identification of student needs (catching students who are off track) with the means to respond to those needs through coordinated programs and personnel (getting those students back on track). These are essential functions of the Diplomas Now focus on students' progress toward high school graduation.

In contrast, Curriculum for College Readiness (0.30) and Professional Development and Peer Coaching (0.44) under Pillar II were the most difficult to implement fully. Although there may be several reasons for these findings, it seems likely that Pillar III may have been implemented more successfully because its components complemented existing practices in schools. The influx of additional on-site staff members and personnel made it easier to successfully adopt a tiered intervention model that used new technology to assess student needs, and to include multiple student support services — such as tutoring and after-school programs — in the existing school structure. In contrast, Pillar II may have been more challenging to implement because its components may have required school staff members to change their existing practices. It may take more time for schools to adopt new curricula and peer coaching models because their effective implementation depends on the trust and investment of school administrators and teachers.

Table 3.5 presents the percentage of DN schools that adequately implemented all of the critical components of each input (that is, the percentage rated as successful for each input), as well as the percentage of critical components that schools not rated as successful did implement adequately. The percentage of critical components adequately implemented at unsuccessful schools indicates how close those schools came to a successful rating for each input. Table 3.5 reveals that compared with other model inputs, higher percentages of DN schools successfully implemented all critical components of Tiered Intervention Supports (88 percent), Family and Community Involvement (66 percent), and Professional Development and Peer Coaching (56 percent). These inputs also seem to represent an "all-or-nothing" scenario, as schools that failed to adequately implement all of the critical components also on average adequately implemented

Diplomas Now

Table 3.4

**Input-Level First-Year Fidelity of Implementation Continuous Score,
Findings Among Diplomas Now Schools**

Model Inputs	Number of Components	All DN Schools Average Continuous Score[a]	DN Middle Schools Average Continuous Score[a]	DN High Schools Average Continuous Score[a]
Pillar I. Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities				
Strong Learning Environments[b]	6	0.67	0.72	0.61
Pillar II. Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development				
Curriculum for College Readiness	24	0.30	0.34	0.26
Professional Development and Peer Coaching[b]	5	0.44	0.47	0.40
Pillar III. Tiered Student Supports				
Tiered Intervention Model[b]	3	0.76	0.75	0.77
Student Supports[b]	24	0.72	0.77	0.67
Student Case Management[b]	14	0.69	0.68	0.70
Pillar IV. Can-Do Culture and Climate				
Integrated On-Site Support[b]	11	0.82	0.83	0.80
Family and Community Involvement	6	0.48	0.53	0.42
Program Staff Training and Development	18	0.61	0.58	0.64
Sample size		32	17	15

(continued)

Table 3.4 (continued)

SOURCES: Diplomas Now fidelity of implementation program staff surveys, spring 2012 and 2013.

NOTES: [a]Each component was rescaled to a 0-1 metric; the continuous score is calculated as the average of the rescaled scores across all components within a given input.

[b]Indicates model inputs designated as critical to the Diplomas Now model.

Diplomas Now

Table 3.5

**Input-Level First-Year Fidelity of Implementation Categorical Rating,
Findings Among Diplomas Now Schools**

Model Inputs	Number of Critical Components	All DN Schools		DN Middle Schools		DN High Schools	
		Percentage of Schools Successful on All Critical Components[a]	Average Percentage of Critical Components Implemented Adequately at Unsuccessful Schools[b]	Percentage of Schools Successful on All Critical Components[a]	Average Percentage of Critical Components Implemented Adequately at Unsuccessful Schools[b]	Percentage of Schools Successful on All Critical Components[a]	Average Percentage of Critical Components Implemented Adequately at Unsuccessful Schools[b]
Pillar I. Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities							
Strong Learning Environments[c,d]	5	0.0	60.2	0.0	60.3	0.0	60.0
Pillar II. Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development							
Curriculum for College Readiness[c]	4	40.6	21.1	35.3	9.1	46.7	37.5
Professional Development and Peer Coaching[d]	2	56.3	10.7	52.9	12.5	60.0	8.3
Pillar III. Tiered Student Supports							
Tiered Intervention Model[d]	2	87.5	37.5	88.2	50.0	86.7	25.0
Student Supports[d]	19	9.4	74.0	17.6	78.6	0.0	69.8
Student Case Management[d]	5	31.3	69.1	29.4	65.0	33.3	74.0
Pillar IV. Can-Do Culture and Climate							
Integrated On-Site Support[d]	9	50.0	81.3	47.1	84.0	53.3	77.8
Family and Community Involvement	1	65.6	0.0	70.6	0.0	60.0	0.0
Program Staff Training and Development	15	12.5	79.0	5.9	77.9	20.0	80.6
Sample size		32		17		15	

53

Table 3.5 (continued)

NOTES: [a]In calculating the categorical implementation rating, a school is considered "successful" for a given input if it adequately implements all of the *critical* components within that input.

[b]The average percentage of critical components implemented adequately at unsuccessful schools excludes schools that were considered successful (that is, adequately implemented all critical components).

[c]Although Strong Learning Environments includes five critical components, middle schools and high schools each have four critical components, as one component is solely for middle schools and one is solely for high schools. Similarly, Curriculum for College Readiness includes four critical components, of which two are solely for middle schools and two are solely for high schools.

[d]Indicates model inputs designated as critical to the Diplomas Now model.

low percentages of the critical components (all less than 40 percent). DN schools struggled to implement all critical components of Strong Learning Environments (0 percent), Student Supports (9 percent), and Program Staff Training and Development (13 percent). However, on average schools that did not successfully implement all of the critical components of these inputs did adequately implement the majority of them (60, 74, and 79 percent of each input's critical components, respectively).

As Table 3.4 and Table 3.5 show, categorical ratings and continuous scores do not always agree, providing two views of Diplomas Now implementation. For five of the nine inputs, the continuous scores indicate that on average the DN schools implemented at least two-thirds of the components (that is, their continuous scores were greater than 0.66). Yet for only one of these inputs are a high percentage of schools rated as successful in implementing the input's critical components: the Tiered Intervention Model (successfully implemented in 88 percent of schools). For three of the other four inputs with high continuous scores — Strong Learning Environments, Student Supports, and Student Case Management — fewer than a third of the schools implemented all critical components; 50 percent of schools adequately implemented the critical components of the remaining input with high continuous scores, Integrated On-Site Support. Thus, although schools did implement many activities related to those inputs, they still have work to do in implementing all of those inputs' critical components. For the three inputs with the lowest continuous scores — Curriculum for College Readiness (0.30), Professional Development and Peer Coaching (0.44), and Family and Community Involvement (0.48) — schools had moderate success implementing the critical components (41 percent, 56 percent, and 66 percent of schools, respectively, successfully implemented all critical components).

Table 3.6 summarizes interview and focus-group data by listing the frequency with which each input was discussed related to four implementation themes. Program and school staff members were asked whether each input was easy to implement or challenging to implement, whether they perceived it to have had an impact, and whether its implementation had yielded lessons for the Diplomas Now model in general and its continued implementation at their schools. Not surprisingly, given the fidelity scores and ratings, teachers expressed mixed feelings about the usefulness of the peer coaching, and most often raised the Professional Development and Peer Coaching input as one that should yield lessons for continuing implementation. More focus-group and interview participants also noted difficulty in implementing the Diplomas Now curriculum than said it was implemented effectively; the two Pillar II inputs were the only ones more often discussed as challenging to implement than successfully implemented. In contrast, teachers attributed improvements in student course work to the Student Supports input, crediting among its other components the Early Warning Indicator meetings and the positive behavior support provided by City Year corps members. Similarly, respondents across all seven case-study schools most frequently discussed the Tiered Intervention Model,

Diplomas Now

Table 3.6

**First-Year Interview and Focus-Group Findings,
Number of Sessions in Which Diplomas Now Program Input Was Discussed, by Implementation Theme**

	Implementation Themes			
Model Inputs	Identified as Effectively Implemented	Identified as Challenging to Implement	Perceived Positive Impact on School or Students	Lessons Learned for Future Implementation
Pillar I. Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities				
Strong Learning Environments[a]	11	5	3	5
Pillar II. Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development				
Curriculum for College Readiness	8	13	2	9
Professional Development and Peer Coaching[a,b]	11	19	1	30
Pillar III. Tiered Student Supports				
Tiered Intervention Model[a]	25	17	7	15
Student Supports[a]	33	21	12	11
Student Case Management[a]	16	5	2	5
Pillar IV. Can-Do Culture and Climate				
Integrated On-Site Support[a]	20	12	4	10
Family and Community Involvement	12	7	9	5

(continued)

Table 3.6 (continued)

NOTES: Data were collected at seven Diplomas Now schools representing four districts. Data-collection activities included 49 interviews and 28 focus groups with a total of 173 participants (25 participants per school, on average).

 This table reflects the number of interviews and focus groups in which each theme was discussed. Each interview or focus group was only counted once regardless of the number of times the theme was discussed during the interview or focus-group session.

 The column labeled "identified as effectively implemented" refers to instances in which interview/focus-group respondents reported that a Diplomas Now program input either was necessary to the success of the Diplomas Now model or was executed effectively. The column labeled "identified as challenging to implement" refers to instances in which interview/focus-group respondents reported that a Diplomas Now program input was difficult to implement, did not work well, or was a barrier to the effective implementation of the Diplomas Now model. The column labeled "perceived positive impact on school or students" refers to instances in which interview/focus-group respondents described changes in school climate, student attendance, student behavior/discipline, or student course performance that they attributed to the implementation of a particular program input. The column labeled "lessons learned for future implementation" refers to instances in which interview/focus-group respondents talked about things they would have done differently, provided recommendations for other schools implementing the Diplomas Now model, described features unique to the first year of implementation, or described implications for sustaining Diplomas Now.

 [a]Indicates model inputs designated as critical to the Diplomas Now model.

 [b]While the inputs listed in the Diplomas Now logic model distinguish between "program staff professional development" and "professional development/peer coaching" for school staff members, the year-one case study analysis plan did not make this distinction and all types of training for both school and program staff members were assigned the same code. Future reports will make a distinction between training received by program staff members and training received by school staff members so that the analysis plan is more parallel to the inputs presented in the logic model.

Integrated On-Site Support, and Student Supports, and usually in the context of effective rather than challenging implementation.

The discussion of input-level implementation fidelity findings that follows is organized according to the Four Pillars of the Diplomas Now model. For each input, the discussion treats fidelity matrix data from program staff surveys as the core findings, supplemented where possible and pertinent with data from school staff surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

Pillar I: Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities

The first pillar of Diplomas Now underscores the importance of clustering teachers and students into teacher teams and small learning communities that promote and generate student engagement and achievement. The Diplomas Now logic model input within this pillar is Strong Learning Environments. Table 3.7 presents additional detail regarding the Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities pillar and its associated inputs and activities. Findings from this section include:

- DN schools were most successful in establishing norms for collaboration, communication, and decision making among school administrators and Diplomas Now program staff members, and in holding at least biweekly review meetings for the Diplomas Now program staff.

- Strong Learning Environments fostered increased collaboration among teachers in both interdisciplinary and vertical subject-area teams, helping to prevent teachers from working in isolation.

- Respondents viewed common planning time, when built into school schedules, as an essential practice that enabled teachers to communicate more effectively with each other about student needs, reinforce and spread consistent messages across student cohorts, and help teachers hold students accountable for academic and behavioral requirements.

Strong Learning Environments

Under Strong Learning Environments, each DN school implements a staffing model that facilitates both interdisciplinary teacher teams and vertical subject-area professional learning communities with common planning time during the school day. Common planning time means that teachers meet at regularly scheduled times to discuss immediate student needs, plan interventions, and coordinate instructional expectations and practices. In a DN high school, the school building is organized into small learning communities or academies, each of which houses a moderate-sized group of students. Each small learning community/academy has

Table 3.7

**Pillar I: Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities,
Input and List of Component Types**

Input	Component Type	Component Definition
Small Learning Environments	Small learning communities	Teams of teachers work with the same group of small students.
	Interdisciplinary teams	Teachers representing different subject areas meet multiple times per week.
	Diplomas Now site-based meetings	School-based program partners (Talent Development, City Year, and Communities In Schools) meet with school administrators.
	Diplomas Now site-based collaboration	School-based program partners have a set of collaborative norms to guide their communication and decision making.
	Extended class periods *(middle schools)*	School day includes 70- to 90-minute periods for all core academic classes (English/language arts, math, social studies, and science).
	4x4 block scheduling *(high schools)*	School day includes 4 70- to 95-minute class periods that meet at least 4 days a week.

NOTE: For more information on components see the full fidelity matrix, Appendix Table B.2.

dedicated administrators and counselors, and an interdisciplinary team of teachers — four to six teachers covering math, English/language arts, science, and social studies/history — who work with the same students throughout the year. Each high school has a ninth-grade academy and two or more thematic or career academies for grades 10 through 12. In addition, the daily school schedule is organized into extended class periods (four classes of 80 to 90 minutes each) to allow for in-depth instruction and differentiated instructional strategies that meet the needs of students with different learning styles.

The continuous score indicates that schools implemented a moderate proportion of all components within Strong Learning Environments (0.67). Although no school adequately implemented all four components identified as critical to Strong Learning Environments, on average schools were successful in implementing the majority of critical components (60 percent; see Table 3.5).

Program staff survey data indicate that DN schools were most successful in establishing norms for collaboration, communication, and decision making among school administrators and Diplomas Now program staff members (97 percent of schools successful), and in holding at least biweekly review meetings for the Diplomas Now program staff (78 percent of schools successful). Diplomas Now staff members who were interviewed emphasized that it was essential to secure the support of school leaders and teachers in order to set up well-functioning schedules for teachers and students working in small learning communities. Furthermore, Diplomas Now staff members reported that it was especially important to set a good tone and high expectations for students during the first year of implementation, and to establish rituals and traditions in each learning community.

DN schools were also moderately successful at implementing small learning communities, with 69 percent of schools organized so that each team of teachers worked with a common, small group of students. Eighty-seven percent of DN high schools used block scheduling or an acceptable alternative; block scheduling provides longer periods in which teachers can collaborate and hold meetings.[9] However, teacher surveys indicate that only 45 percent of core sixth- and ninth-grade teachers reported having adequate common planning time with an interdisciplinary team and only 52 percent reported having adequate common planning time with same-subject learning professionals.[10] Interview and focus-group data reveal that overall, Strong Learning Environments fostered increased collaboration among teachers in both interdisciplinary and vertical subject-area teams, which helped prevent teachers from working in isolation. In addition, when schools did implement common planning time school and program staff members saw it as essential, enabling teachers to communicate more effectively with each other about students' needs, reinforce and spread consistent messages across student cohorts, and hold students accountable for academic and behavioral requirements across classrooms.

The components of the Strong Learning Environment input reported to be most difficult to implement were scheduling interdisciplinary team meetings and creating extended class periods in middle schools. Based on program staff surveys, only 25 percent of schools reported scheduling interdisciplinary team meetings multiple times a week, and 53 percent of DN middle schools reported allowing 70- to 90-minute class periods for core academic courses. These findings are consistent with the data from school staff surveys, in which only 26 percent of administrators reported that interdisciplinary teams engaged in common planning more than once a week. Interviews and focus groups with Diplomas Now staff members suggest that some of the difficulty in implementing common planning time resulted from union requirements, schedule conflicts, and lack of support from school administrators.

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[9]Rettig and Canady (1996).

[10]Adequacy for these components is defined as at least one to two hours of common planning time a week.

Pillar II. Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development

The second pillar of the Diplomas Now model promotes common instructional curricula and effective classroom practices. The Diplomas Now logic model inputs included in this pillar are Curriculum for College Readiness and Professional Development and Peer Coaching. Table 3.8 presents additional detail regarding the Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development pillar and its associated inputs and activities. This section discusses these main findings:

- Curriculum for College Readiness has the lowest continuous scores (0.30) of any input; only 41 percent of schools successfully implemented all of its critical components, indicating that schools found it the most difficult to implement. Very few DN middle schools offered reform curricula; in contrast, DN high schools had moderate success offering freshman seminars and creating separate ninth-grade academies.

- DN schools generally succeeded in providing support to English/language arts and math teachers; however, instructional coaches struggled to meet the adequacy standards for frequency of planning, coteaching, and debriefing sessions with teachers.

- Teachers expressed mixed opinions about the usefulness of peer coaching, while school administrators were more likely to express positive views about its effectiveness.

Curriculum for College Readiness

To prepare students for high school graduation and college, Diplomas Now provides schools with Talent Development Secondary's reform curricula, which are intended to promote active learning, close skill gaps, develop mature thinking, and improve achievement. Diplomas Now's curricula for middle schools integrate high school readiness and evidence-based core academic principles in math, English/language arts, science, and social studies. DN middle schools also have access to the *Mastering the Middle Grades Curriculum*, designed to facilitate the transition to middle school through instruction in life and study skills. For high schools, Diplomas Now offers a freshman seminar curriculum to ease the transition into high school, and evidence-based college preparatory curricula in core subjects.

Of all the Diplomas Now model inputs, schools had the most difficulty fully implementing Curriculum for College Readiness, with a continuous score of 0.30 (see Table 3.4). Additionally, only 41 percent of schools successfully implemented all of its critical components (two critical components for middle schools and two for high schools). Middle schools

Diplomas Now

Table 3.8

**Pillar II: Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development,
Inputs and List of Component Types**

Input	Component Type	Component Definition
Curriculum for College Readiness	Reform English/language arts and mathematics curricula	Middle schools have implemented the *Student Team Literature* curriculum and an evidence-based math curriculum, or approved alternative interventions. High schools have implemented specific reform curricula for each grade level, such as *Transitions to Advanced Mathematics* and *Reading and Writing in Your Career* for freshmen.
	Reading and mathematics labs	Middle schools have implemented *Savvy Readers' Lab* or an approved alternative. Middle school and high schools have implemented the *Computer and Team Assisted Mathematics Acceleration (CATAMA)* program or, an approved alternative.
	Reform climate and success skills curriculum *(middle schools)*	Middle schools have implemented the *Mastering the Middle Grades* curriculum and a program focused on building a positive school climate in all grade levels.
	Ninth-grade success academies *(high schools)*	High schools are structured to include a separate academy for ninth-graders with its own administrators, teachers, and counselors.
	Freshman seminar *(high schools)*	A seminar is offered in the first semester of high school to acclimate students to school culture and expectations.
Professional Development and Peer Coaching	Instructional coaching for English/language arts and math teachers	English/language arts and math teachers are provided with weekly help from coaches (including planning support, coteaching, modeling, and debriefing).
	Freshman seminar support	Freshman seminar teachers receive specific professional development and support.

NOTE: For more information on components see the full fidelity matrix, Appendix Table B.2.

struggled to implement the reform curricula provided by Diplomas Now or adequate alternatives, with only 41 percent doing so for English/language arts and 29 percent for math.[11] Additionally, very few DN middle schools (12 percent) offered the *Mastering the Middle Grades Curriculum*, which includes instruction in life skills and study skills.

In contrast, program staff surveys reveal that DN high schools were moderately successful in offering freshman seminars (73 percent did so) and in creating separate academies for incoming ninth-grade students (60 percent). As shown in Table 3.4, the continuous score of DN high schools (0.26) was lower than that of DN middle schools (0.34). However, a higher percentage of high schools than middle schools had success adequately implementing all critical components (47 percent compared with 35 percent). The school staff surveys also highlighted this difference between middle and high schools: only 52 percent of middle school administrators reported instituting a course on effective transitions, compared with 86 percent of high school administrators.

Students and teachers at case-study schools reported that the Diplomas Now curricula helped students transition into middle school or high school by teaching essential skills — like taking notes and delivering presentations — that could be applied in other classes. Some schools, however, did not implement the transition courses at all and others only implemented some elements of them. Teachers and administrators sometimes reported that the Diplomas Now transition courses "took up a lot of room" in student schedules, and schools often did not decide who would teach them until late in the summer, with the result that some teachers assigned to them did not receive adequate training.

Professional Development and Peer Coaching

At every DN school, instructional coaches are assigned to work with school administrators and with English/language arts and math teachers. Coaches provide initial training for all transition courses, instruction in how to teach an extended class period, professional development and in-classroom support, and customized training and workshops. In addition, DN schools are encouraged to identify and train local teachers to coteach, model lessons, serve as curriculum coaches, and support the full implementation of the Diplomas Now model. Diplomas Now instructional facilitators provide guidance to the instructional coaches at multiple DN schools, and also work directly with teachers in schools.

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[11]Diplomas Now reform English/language arts and math curricula include *The Savvy Readers' Lab* and *The Computer and Team Assisted Mathematics Acceleration Lab* (CATAMA). Together they provide additional resources for students who are considerably behind in reading and math. Under the Diplomas Now model, schools can opt to implement existing curricula or programs already targeting these students.

The average continuous score for Professional Development and Peer Coaching is 0.44 (see Table 3.4), and 56 percent of DN schools successfully implemented the input's two critical components (see Table 3.5). Program staff surveys reveal that DN schools generally provided at least one period a week of support to English/language arts and math teachers (63 percent and 59 percent, respectively), although instructional coaches struggled to provide biweekly planning, coteaching, and debriefing sessions with teachers (41 percent for English/language arts and math). Not surprisingly in light of the Diplomas Now high school curriculum findings, 73 percent of DN high schools provided professional development and job-embedded support directly geared to freshmen seminar teachers. The strong correlation between training and support for freshmen seminar teachers and success in offering these seminars in high schools underscores the importance of adequate professional development and training.

During interviews and focus groups, teachers expressed mixed views regarding the usefulness of peer coaching. Some teachers stated that they greatly benefited from peer coaching, while others saw it as an added burden. School administrators were more likely than teachers to express positive views about the effectiveness of peer coaching, but noted also that some teachers were not open to change or did not believe that they needed coaching. Instructional coaches and teachers from some schools indicated that the training held at the beginning of the school year was poorly organized, which negatively influenced the interest and support that teachers displayed for the Diplomas Now curricula and resulted in instructional coaches feeling ill prepared.

Instructional coaches and instructional facilitators reportedly had the greatest impact when they spent time building relationships with teachers to learn more about their concerns, so that they could tailor their coaching sessions and training accordingly.

Pillar III. Tiered Student Supports

The third pillar of the Diplomas Now model relates to the provision of intensive and timely aid to students through a tiered system of interventions and resources wherein students with greater needs receive more intensive services. The Diplomas Now logic model inputs included in this pillar are Tiered Intervention Model, Student Supports, and Student Case Management. Table 3.9 presents additional detail regarding the Tiered Student Supports pillar and its associated inputs and activities. This section describes these main findings:

- The majority of DN schools successfully integrated a tiered intervention model into the school day and implemented an Early Warning Indicator (EWI) system to alert teachers when students begin to demonstrate off-track indicators.

Diplomas Now

Table 3.9

**Pillar III: Tiered Student Supports,
Inputs and List of Component Types**

Input	Component Type	Component Definition
Tiered Intervention Model	Tiered intervention model integrated in the school day	A plan for integrating the use of the EWI system and scheduling EWI meetings (see below) is in place.
	Coordinated early warning indicator (EWI) system	A data system is in place to alert teachers when students demonstrate tendencies that suggest they are moving off the graduation track.
	Collaborative, interdisciplinary EWI meetings	Teams of teachers from different subject areas discuss and plan interventions for students shown to be at risk of not graduating according to the EWI system.
Student Supports	Attendance and behavior assistance	Students identified as at risk (Tier II) receive attendance and behavior coaching from City Year corps members.
	Academic assistance	Students identified as at risk (Tier II) receive literacy and math tutoring from City Year corps members.
	Classroom support	City Year corps members offer additional support to students identified as at risk (Tier II) during their English/language arts and math classes.
	After-school programs	City Year corps members support after-school and extended learning time programs and recruit students identified as at risk (Tier II) for these programs.
	Whole-school activities	City Year corps members help organize activities such as health fairs and career days.
Student Case Management	Case management of Tier III students	Students identified as most at risk (Tier III) are provided with individual student plans. The Communities In Schools site coordinator manages attendance, behavioral, and academic interventions for them as needed.
	Whole-school services	The Communities In Schools site coordinator provides college/career, enrichment/motivation, family-engagement, life-skills, and mental and physical health services, along with community service project opportunities.

NOTE: For more information on components see the full fidelity matrix, Appendix Table B.2.

- EWI meetings facilitated information sharing, collaboration, and improved working relationships between school staff members and program staff members, and some teachers attributed improvements in students' course work to information shared during EWI meetings.

- Student Supports — such as tutoring and after-school programs — were often identified as having a positive effect on student behavior and the overall school climate. DN schools were most effective in offering embedded support for English/language arts and math classrooms (for example, individual student attention and small-group tutoring during class periods). However, many schools struggled to extend this resource to all classrooms or to implement after-school programs effectively.

- All DN schools provided some case management to students identified as needing Tier III intervention, but many struggled to provide academic assistance to these same case-managed students beyond the services already provided in Tier II.

Tiered Intervention Model

Each DN school establishes an early intervention system that uses EWI system data to trigger interventions targeted to student needs. EWI system data provide schools with on- and off-track indicators and early warning flags related to students' attendance, behavior, and course performance — or as the Diplomas Now literature refers to them, the ABCs. The goal of the EWI system is to ensure that the right students receive the right intervention at the right time and at the right intensity. At each school, an EWI interdisciplinary team — which includes the Talent Development school transformation facilitator, administrators, teachers, City Year corps members, and Communities In Schools site coordinators — meets regularly to review and analyze EWI data. Through this analysis, the EWI team identifies interventions to meet the needs of all students (Tier I); targeted interventions (such as small-group activities or individual tutoring) for students who are not succeeding even after Tier I whole-school or classroom interventions (Tier II); and intensive interventions (for example, implementing a behavior-management system) for students at the greatest risk of falling off the path to graduation (Tier III).

The Tiered Intervention Model was by far the most successfully implemented input, with a continuous score of 0.76 and 88 percent of DN schools successfully meeting all critical components (see Tables 3.4 and 3.5). Identifying students in need (that is, students who are underperforming in attendance, behavior, or course work) and then connecting them with staff members and programs that can address their needs is a crucial element of the Diplomas Now model intended to get students back on track toward graduation. As such, a strong start in the

implementation of tiered interventions shows promise that schools can provide continuing support to help students progress toward their diplomas. Although it can be challenging to get EWI systems in place and coordinate among three organizational partners the tiered programs meant to meet students' needs, program staff surveys indicate that 75 percent of DN schools did integrate a tiered intervention model into the school day; 94 percent coordinated an EWI system to alert teachers when students begin to demonstrate off-track indicators (that is, measures of attendance, behavior, and course grades below established thresholds); and 91 percent scheduled biweekly collaborative and interdisciplinary EWI meetings. Moreover, all administrators reported that their schools regularly tracked student-level performance data in order to identify at-risk students. School staff survey data suggest that a subset of schools faced challenges with the frequency of EWI meetings: only 48 percent of administrators indicated that EWI meetings occurred at least weekly (although 81 percent reported that EWI meetings occurred more than once a month).

Diplomas Now program staff members at high schools and middle schools frequently identified Tiered Intervention Model services as effectively implemented (Appendix Table C.2). Interviewed participants also noted the successes, challenges, and lessons they had learned from the first year of implementing the Tiered Intervention Model. For example, some teachers attributed improved student course work to information shared during EWI meetings. As one teacher said:

> They'll bring students into our EWI meetings and show them, "Look, this is where you are in all your classes. All your teachers know where you're at right now." And when they see that and they know that all of their teachers know that they're behind, that helps as well. So I've seen an improvement from the beginning of the year for some students with course performance.

EWI meetings were most often perceived as successful at those schools where the school transformation facilitator had built strong working relationships with teachers and administrators. These relationships were essential for ensuring that administrators held teachers accountable for attending EWI meetings, and that teachers were actively engaged in the EWI process. Interview and focus-group participants also noted that EWI meetings could serve as a way to encourage teachers to talk about students, that they facilitated information sharing and collaboration, and that they improved working relationships between school staff members and program staff members. However, participants also noted that their demanding work schedules made it challenging for teachers to attend frequent EWI meetings. To alleviate this challenge, interviewees suggested that administrators and program staff members work with teachers to identify a meeting schedule convenient for all participants, and offer stipends to teachers for attending EWI meetings after school hours.

Student Supports

Students identified by EWI data as requiring Tier II interventions receive additional support services from City Year corps members, which can include behavior and attendance coaching or management, after-school programs, academic tutoring (both individual and group), one-on-one mentoring, and near-peer role modeling. Students also receive in-class support services, such as one-on-one or small-group tutoring, from corps members embedded primarily in their English/language arts and math classes.

Continuous scores for Student Supports are among the highest of all the inputs (0.72), although only 9 percent of DN schools adequately implemented all 19 critical components, (see Table 3.4 and Table 3.5). These findings are not surprising given the great number of components identified as critical. Moreover, the 91 percent of DN schools that did not adequately implement *all* critical components of Student Supports did succeed in implementing most of them (74 percent).

Program staff survey data also reveal general success in the implementation of Student Supports. All DN schools offered additional year-round, in-class support structures for English/language arts and math classrooms (100 percent) and provided at least four whole-school activities. An overwhelming majority (94 percent) also provided adequate behavior and attendance coaching to students.[12] These findings are consistent with those of the school staff surveys, in which administrators reported that students were offered weekly opportunities for academic tutoring (99 percent), behavior or anger management support (78 percent), and academic enrichment activities (93 percent). Moreover, the majority of sixth- and ninth-grade English/language arts and math teachers (82 percent) reported that students participated in tutoring at least once a week. In contrast, survey responses from sixth- and ninth-grade core course teachers reveal one shortfall in Student Supports: only 38 percent reported that behavior coaching for frequently disruptive students was provided either often or as needed, suggesting a gap in services for at-risk students.

Interestingly, although DN schools effectively offered additional in-class support structures, many struggled to provide that support to all classrooms. Only 50 percent of DN schools provided embedded City Year corps members in an adequate percentage of sixth- and ninth-grade English/language arts classrooms, and 41 percent did so in an adequate percentage of math classrooms.[13] Schools also struggled to meet the Diplomas Now goals for after-school programs, with only 41 percent integrating corps members into existing after-school

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[12]Adequacy for these components is defined as at least one student receiving behavior or attendance coaching per City Year corps member.

[13]Adequacy for this component is defined as providing embedded corps members in at least 75 percent of English/language arts and math classrooms.

programs, and only 47 percent providing after-school programs for at least three-quarters of the school year.

Of all the inputs, Student Supports was most often identified during interviews and focus groups as having had a positive impact on student behavior and school climate during the first year of implementation (Appendix Table C.2). One district administrator noted the benefits of Student Supports, highlighting positive changes to school culture:

> City Year has promoted things like positive behavior support. They provide after-school tutoring, they make great relationships, great connections, and relationships with our kids as mentors, as role models, and I think more than anything else, they are just an active, energetic, passionate group of young people that are committed to social change and their positive attitude helps change the culture of schools.

Teachers most often expressed support for placing City Year corps members in their classrooms to work one-on-one with students and provide them individual attention. According to a middle school teacher:

> Because I'm a first-year teacher, I think having [corps members'] support in the classroom has helped me tremendously, especially with the struggling students ... since I don't know how to be able to help every single student at one time, they're there to help either pull out students or work with a group of students who need some extra support.

The interviews and focus groups, however, revealed challenges during the first year of implementation that resulted from poorly defined expectations about the role corps members should play in classrooms. Some teachers saw corps members as a "distraction" and noted both advantages and disadvantages to the near-peer relationship. On the one hand the near-peer relationship facilitated trust between corps members and students, but in other cases corps members struggled to define their mentoring role. These findings from a selection of DN schools suggest that training for corps members should emphasize the importance of setting appropriate boundaries with students, and provide additional guidance on building relationships with teachers to ensure well-defined roles and expectations for corps members in the classroom.

Student Case Management

The Communities In Schools site coordinator provides case management to students whose indicators suggest that they are off track and require Tier III interventions, the most intensive support. The site coordinator conducts a needs assessment to determine the range, scale, and scope of the specialized support these students need. Next, the site coordinator develops an individual plan for each student, provides referrals for social services, coordinates individual or group counseling, completes home visits, and develops peer support groups.

Depending on the needs identified, case management can include academic assistance and career or college prep activities. Working daily or weekly with at-risk students, the site coordinator serves as a resource for these students and monitors their progress. Case management services are intended to reduce barriers to engagement and learning and lead to improved student outcomes.

The continuous score of 0.69 for the Student Case Management input (see Table 3.4) suggests that schools implemented most of its components. Only 31 percent of DN schools successfully implemented all five critical components of Student Case Management, but on average the remaining 69 percent of schools successfully implemented 69 percent of the critical components (see Table 3.5). Compared with attendance and behavior interventions for students identified as needing them (75 and 91 percent of schools did an adequate job of implementing such interventions, respectively), schools had the most difficulty providing interventions to students identified as needing Tier III academic assistance (66 percent).[14] It is possible that, in light of the many opportunities for academic assistance offered by the City Year corps members as part of the Student Supports input (Tier II), site coordinators may have found it difficult to provide additional or alternative academic assistance.

In general, schools were most successful in providing enrichment and motivational services (97 percent adequate), and in developing individual plans for case-managed students (91 percent adequate).[15] In addition, 88 percent of DN schools provided adequate needs-based resource interventions to case-managed students.[16] School and program staff members at case-study schools reported that site coordinators improved communication between the school and students' homes, keeping students on track and parents better informed. Similarly, some students reported that site coordinators cared about their well-being, and administrators often noted that site coordinators provided additional support to their most at-risk students. As one high school principal said, "[Communities in Schools] has been a great model to give support to the kids who really need extra help beyond what [City Year] and [Talent Development] can offer."

However, some program and school staff members reported that they did not clearly understand how the site coordinator's role differed from that of the school counselor. Similarly, at some case-study schools a single student could be seeing multiple counselors, making it

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[14]Adequacy for these components is defined as providing appropriate interventions to at least 75 percent of Tier III case-managed students identified as needing them.

[15]Adequacy for this component is defined as providing individual student plans to at least 75 percent of case-managed students.

[16]Adequacy for this component is defined as providing appropriate resources and interventions to at least 75 percent of case-managed students identified as having nonacademic needs (such as needs for food, clothing, or shelter).

difficult for the site coordinator to define a distinctive role. In other instances, site coordinators took on administrative duties that limited their availability to perform case-management activities. These findings highlight how important it is for site coordinators to work closely with school counselors to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each and to reduce redundancy. Improved coordination of services would enable site coordinators to provide more intensive continuing interventions to a smaller number of students, while school counselors serve a larger portion of the student population.

Pillar IV. Can-Do Culture and Climate

The fourth pillar of the Diplomas Now model is about developing a school-wide culture of success. Adding to the foundation of the previous three pillars, it emphasizes raising expectations and providing engaging learning experiences. The Diplomas Now logic model inputs included in this pillar are Integrated On-Site Support and Family and Community Involvement. Table 3.10 presents additional detail regarding the Can-Do Culture and Climate pillar and its associated inputs and activities. This section discusses these main findings:

- Integrated On-Site Support is among the most fully implemented of the Diplomas Now model inputs, with most schools able to hire the full staff envisioned by the model.

- The findings identified two important considerations when selecting on-site support staff members. First, involving school administrators in the selection process can help ensure that they view the staff members selected as "good fits" for the school's needs and culture. Second, on-site support staff members with a history of working in a school district may understand that district's culture better, making it more likely that teachers will believe in them, invest in them, and trust them.

- The majority of DN schools engaged families and the community by offering workshops for parents, by ensuring that teachers made contact with parents at least once during the school year, and by scheduling parent-teacher conferences to include families and core teachers. Despite these efforts, many schools struggled to sustain active family and community engagement.

Integrated On-Site Support

To carry out all the programmatic, structural, and curricular components of the Diplomas Now program, numerous on-site staff members are needed. These staff members make it possible for schools to plan and implement the Diplomas Now model.

Diplomas Now

Table 3.10

**Pillar IV: Can-Do Culture and Climate,
Inputs and List of Component Types**

Input	Component Type	Component Definition
Integrated On-Site Support	School Transformation Facilitator	The school transformation facilitator — who coordinates reform efforts including reform curricula, professional development, and the tiered intervention model — is in place prior to the first day of school.
	Instructional coaches	Math and English/language arts coaches who provide professional development to teachers are in place at the school at least half the time.
	Communities In Schools site coordinator	The Communities In Schools site coordinator — who manages the cases of Tier III students and provides additional whole-school services — is in place before the first student progress report.
	City Year corps members	There is at least one City Year corps member for every 49 students. These volunteers provide attendance and behavior coaching, academic tutoring and in-class and after-school support.
Family and Community Involvement	Engaging parents	A school action plan is in place to develop, implement, and evaluate work on family and community engagement. Parent volunteers are recruited and trained, parent-teacher conferences are scheduled with all parents, parent workshops are offered, and teachers send information to parents on how to help their children.

NOTE: For more information on components see the full fidelity matrix, Appendix Table B.2.

- A **Talent Development school transformation facilitator** works with the school's leadership team to organize smaller learning communities or academies within schools. Facilitators also work with leadership teams to analyze data, establish a positive school climate, and encourage effective leadership and teaching practices.

- **Instructional coaches** provide instructional and curricular assistance to math and English/language arts teachers. They also collaborate with freshman seminar teams (interdisciplinary teams of teachers who work with the same ninth-grade students throughout the year) to develop lessons, projects, and other teaching strategies.

- A **Communities In Schools site coordinator** makes use of existing community and school resources to organize whole-school interventions that are available to any student in the school. These activities can include health screenings, career and college fairs, donations of school supplies, and motivational events. The coordinator also provides case management to Tier III students as described above.

- Ten to 20 trained **City Year corps members** are placed in each DN school at least four days a week. They are at the school before it opens and remain until the end of the after-school program, throughout the academic year. Corps members provide academic assistance inside and outside of class, engage with parents, run after-school programs, and operate programs intended to improve the school climate and attendance school-wide and for targeted groups of students. They also help teachers manage the data needed to operate the EWI system. Corps members are overseen by a **City Year program manager.**

With a continuous score of 0.82, Integrated On-Site Support was the most fully implemented Diplomas Now model input (see Table 3.4). Although only 50 percent of DN schools implemented all of this input's nine critical components adequately (see Table 3.5), the other 50 percent did implement the majority (81 percent) of the critical components. This widespread success is not surprising, given that this input is a precursor to many of the others. Numerous components — Early Warning Indicators, instructional coaching, student tutoring, and after-school activities — could not be accomplished without the additional on-site personnel brought in by Diplomas Now.

Additionally, most schools reported having all of the support staff members listed above, although their start dates and time at the school were often not quite ideal. Program staff surveys indicate that 81 percent of schools had a school transformation facilitator in place prior to the start of the school year. Eighty-one percent of schools had an English/language arts instructional coach at least half time, and 75 percent of schools had a math coach. Ninety-seven percent of all schools had a Communities In Schools site coordinator in place, with 81 percent starting prior to the first day of school. Seventy-eight percent of schools maintained an adequate corps-member-to-student ratio.[17] Additionally, 96 percent of administrators and 67 percent of sixth- and ninth-grade English/language arts and math teachers reported that City Year corps members worked with students more than once a week.

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[17]An adequate corps-member-to-student-ratio is defined as 1 to 49 or fewer.

According to interview and focus-group data, school and program staff members reported high levels of both successes and challenges associated with the Integrated On-Site Support input (Appendix Table C.2). Participants in interviews and focus groups — both Diplomas Now staff participants and school staff participants — discussed successes more often than challenges. The successes they discussed related to their ability to get capable Diplomas Now support staff members in place at their schools. The challenges they discussed usually related to difficulties in developing the collaborative relationships between Diplomas Now staff members and school staff members that are important to model implementation. For example, some on-site support staff members reported that they struggled with their limited decision-making authority and influence at schools, which affected capable staff members' ability to execute their assigned tasks. One school-based Diplomas Now staff member said:

> We have two phenomenal coaches here, and though the quality of instruction, in my opinion, is still low, it is because the coaches do not have the administrative power to really intervene, they can just coach and make recommendations but they can't be the administrator that says, "Why aren't you doing this?"

Participants also often reported that on-site support staff members had more impact on newer teachers and less investment from more experienced teachers, who tended to be less receptive to "new" ways of doing things (for example, new curricula and peer coaching). Teachers at the case-study schools also varied in how they described their perceptions of the collaborations between the teaching staff and the Diplomas Now staff. Some teachers did not think on-site support staff members had an impact on their teaching, while others saw great value in these staff members. Chapter 4 discusses in further detail the nature of a few different types of staff collaborations, including collaborations between Diplomas Now and school staff members.

Family and Community Involvement

The Diplomas Now model assumes a concerted effort to engage in family and community partnerships that promote student success. As schools develop career academies, they involve local businesses, professionals, and government agencies in planning and implementing academy activities and work experiences for students, such as job shadowing and internships. City Year corps members lead community service opportunities for students, conduct outreach to parents, and in cooperation with the school's staff and the site coordinator, organize and participate in school events like health fairs for family and community members. Through these efforts, DN schools seek to increase parent and community support and engagement in the schools and in student academic performance.

Overall, 66 percent of DN schools adequately implemented the single critical component under Family and Community Involvement, which assessed how well actual practices to

engage parents and community members lived up to their ideal versions (see Table 3.5). The average continuous score across all six components is 0.48 (see Table 3.4). Program staff survey data indicate that 88 percent of DN schools offered at least two to three workshops for parents, teachers in 78 percent of schools made contact with parents at least once during the school year to discuss how parents could help their children, and 75 percent of schools scheduled parent-teacher conferences with families and core teachers. However, only 56 percent of schools identified a community engagement action team, which the model defines as a team of school, family, and community members established and trained to develop, implement, and evaluate the school's work on family and community engagement. Only 19 percent formally recruited and trained parents to work as school volunteers. Additionally, although 96 percent of sixth- and ninth-grade teachers surveyed reported offering opportunities to parents to participate in school initiatives more than once a year, only 31 percent reported that parents or guardians actually participated.

Program Staff Training and Development

Although not included in any specific pillar, Program Staff Training and Development is an important input that influenced first-year implementation, and it was among the inputs most often discussed during the interviews and focus groups. Interviewees and focus-group participants most often viewed the training and professional development provided to program staff members as a vital process that helped to foster good working relationships and to orient program staff members to the different program components and the interactions among them. Because the Diplomas Now model has so many components, both school and program staff members emphasized the importance of defining the roles of all partners early and of spending time with school staff members devising strategies to integrate Diplomas Now's components into the school. This section discusses these main findings:

- The majority of DN schools did not successfully implement all 15 critical components of Program Staff Training and Development. However, on average schools needed to implement only three to four more components to be rated as successful.

- The most difficult components for schools to implement included having instructional coaches attend English/language arts and math summer institutes, having site coordinators complete certification modules, and arranging continuing EWI training for City Year corps members.

Overall, the continuous score for Program Staff Training and Development is 0.61 (see Table 3.4). Although only 13 percent of schools successfully implemented all 15 critical components, on average the remaining DN schools did successfully implement the majority of them (79 percent, see Table 3.5). Program staff survey data indicate that 78 percent of schools

reported that all local Diplomas Now partners attended the three-day Summer Institute training session or received alternate training; that 81 percent of schools partially implemented a professional development plan to train teachers and school-based staff members on-site in curriculum, school climate, and working in teams; and that 94 percent of corps members had participated in relevant teacher professional development activities at least once or twice. Additionally, 59 percent of schools scheduled joint Diplomas Now staff, school administrator, and teacher planning sessions before the start of the school year.

In the program staff surveys, three components of Program Staff Training and Development were reported as being the most difficult to implement: having instructional coaches attend summer institutes in English/language arts (47 percent) and math (44 percent), having site coordinators complete certification modules (41 percent), and arranging for City Year corps members to receive continuing training (34 percent).

Similarly, interviewees and focus-group participants noted challenges related to program staff training and professional development during the first year of implementation. Program staff members at some schools did not learn about summer training sessions because they received no communication about them. In other cases, program staff members were hired after the training sessions occurred. In interviews, City Year corps members and teachers alike suggested scheduling joint training sessions that included teachers and Diplomas Now program staff members before the school year began, so as to more clearly define roles, responsibilities, and expectations. As one middle school teacher said: "I feel like we were given an idea of [corps members'] role, but not specifically how to incorporate them most effectively into our classroom."

Some corps members indicated during focus groups that most of their training had focused on academic intervention, and suggested that more time be spent on managing the behavioral and emotional difficulties that students identify. Other corps members suggested additional training on developing lesson plans and dealing with students who have endured trauma, and better examples of situations that warrant mandated reporting.

These insights highlight the importance of effectively coordinating summer training sessions and communicating with teachers and program staff members about them, to ensure that Diplomas Now school-based staff members are well prepared and properly trained when the school year begins.

Summary

Across DN schools, the Tiered Intervention Model, Integrated On-Site Support, and Student Supports were among the most fully implemented program inputs during the first year. Some

schools had activities associated with these inputs in place already, such as tiered support for students and common planning time for teachers. In some cases, the implementation of one input was a precursor to others. For example, many members of the Integrated On-Site Support staff needed to be in place before program inputs such as Student Supports and Student Case Management became possible. Implementing the full Diplomas Now model depends on Talent Development Secondary, City Year, and Communities In Schools' ability to work together within a single school. It is not a simple undertaking for three different organizations that are new to a school to begin collaborating in a coordinated way that allows them to deliver services that address the goals of both their individual organizations and the Diplomas Now model as a whole. Thus it is not trivial that in their first year schools achieved relative success in implementing those aspects of the model closely linked to this collaboration, and the evaluation will investigate the potential value of this accomplishment over time.

Curriculum development and peer coaching were among the most difficult inputs to implement. Qualitative data reveal that school staff members often were not convinced of the value of implementing new curricula, and some teachers were reluctant to be coached. These findings speak to the importance of involving a school's staff in selecting program staff members, if possible, to encourage greater rapport and trust between school and Diplomas Now staff members. This is especially the case for instructional coaches, who frequently interact with teachers on a one-on-one, peer-to-peer basis. Also, it is possible that the tight timeline for bringing many of the DN schools into the project left less time than might be desirable for the Diplomas Now partners to build some of these relationships with school staff members before model implementation began.

The importance of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities was also a recurring theme. Considering the large number of program components that had to be implemented at DN schools, and the number of additional staff members enlisted to support implementation, it is understandable that both Diplomas Now program staff members and school staff members were uncertain about each other's roles and expectations. Especially during the first year of implementation, it is essential to clarify the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of all parties by providing additional guidance, by building relationships between Diplomas Now staff members and teachers, and by offering continual program staff training, school staff training, and joint training.

Although categorical ratings only ranged from low to moderate, a deeper analysis of the percentage of critical components implemented within each input reveals specific areas where targeted efforts could improve fidelity ratings substantially. For example, ensuring that instructional coaches attend the summer institute, that site coordinators complete certification modules, and that continuing EWI training is available for City Year corps members would greatly improve the categorical rating for Program Staff Training and Development. Moreover,

ensuring that Diplomas Now program staff members are identified and complete their training before the school year begins would go far to improve ratings across multiple inputs. The Integrated On-Site Support input is critically important to implementation, because it is a precursor to many of the other Diplomas Now model inputs and components. In this way, concentrating on some of the most difficult-to-implement components could substantially strengthen fidelity of implementation in DN schools.

Overall, program staff survey data indicate that Diplomas Now partners adequately collaborated with each other, with the overwhelming majority of school-based staff members indicating they had access to each other for timely assistance. Chapter 4 continues to explore collaboration among Diplomas Now staff members and between Diplomas Now and school staff members during the first year of implementation, drawing primarily on qualitative case-study data.

Chapter 4

Collaborative Interactions Among Partners in the Implementation of the Diplomas Now Model

School improvement necessitates that people act, react, and interact in new ways, and effective collaboration is essential to such change. Lessons from the first year of implementation of the Diplomas Now model reflect many of the findings from the school reform literature concerning interactions between external agencies and schools.[1] Lessons from Diplomas Now may be particularly illuminating in reflecting the experiences of staff members from three different organizations coming together to work with schools on a complex reform model. Although these initial lessons are limited, they may be instructive to others engaging in similarly complex interactions with schools.

The main points to take away from this chapter are:

- Assigning Diplomas Now school-based staff members work spaces in close proximity to one another facilitates interaction conducive to implementation: continual communication, resource sharing, trust building and mutual awareness, and collective problem solving.

- Clarifying and establishing roles and responsibilities early promotes cohesion within the Diplomas Now school-based staff and accountability among staff members for those responsibilities.

- Hiring and situating Diplomas Now school-based staff members in the school before the academic year begins appears to facilitate cooperation that results in quick implementation of short-term program goals as well as longer-term planning for collaborative initiatives.

- Training sessions and forums that clearly communicate what Diplomas Now entails for a school and its personnel, and that include examples of successful outcomes, may help attract the interest and commitment of administrators and teachers.

- Diplomas Now school-based staff members can anticipate that resistance from administrators and teachers may occur, especially in the beginning.

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[1]Berends, Kirby, Naftel, and McKelvey (2001); Lachman and Wlodarczyk (2011); Rowan, Correnti, Miller, and Camburn (2009); Smylie and Evans (2006); Spillane, Gomez, and Mesler (2009).

Continual efforts to build rapport — including flexibility and respect for the school's context and culture — could mitigate those challenges.

- City Year corps members appear to be the aspect of the Diplomas Now program most visible to students, suggesting that school-based staff members should consider how they can capitalize on the role of corps members to better understand student needs and respond to them.

The Diplomas Now model requires that many individuals in different roles work together over time to deliver whole-school support (Tier I), student support (Tier II), and student case management (Tier III). Effective collaboration is the heart of this complex school reform, which deploys staff members from Talent Development Secondary, City Year, and Communities In Schools to interact with each other, school personnel, students, parents, and community members over the course of implementation. The program model asserts that individuals from the three partner organizations will establish shared norms for working together, communicate continuously, share leadership responsibilities, and make decisions together in order to achieve the program's goals of improving student attendance, behavior, and course performance.

The findings presented in this chapter are drawn primarily from qualitative data collected through interviews and focus groups at seven Diplomas Now case-study schools in four school districts. Participants shared their perceptions in response both to specific questions about collaboration and to more general questions about factors that expedited or hindered program implementation. The chapter presents common findings across participants and schools, as well as individual perspectives and experiences. The findings are based on interviews and focus groups with individuals who volunteered to participate. The research team applied systematic analysis consistent with best practices in qualitative research. In addition, data from the Diplomas Now program staff surveys indicate how partner organizations supported each other and the extent to which school and district personnel responded to the needs expressed by Diplomas Now school-based staff members. Given the breadth of the data that emerged, this chapter draws attention to themes that were commonly mentioned by participants, notes exceptions where relevant, and provides details to illustrate the perceptions of individual participants. However, it is not possible or practical to capture all the concepts that emerged from all of the 77 interview and focus-group sessions.

Table 4.1 details the different types of collaborative interactions according to the following implementation themes: facilitators of implementation and examples of effective collaboration; barriers to implementation and examples of ineffective collaboration; perceived positive impacts on school climate, staff, or students; and lessons learned for future implementation. The interviewees and focus groups primarily discussed collaborative interactions

Diplomas Now

Table 4.1

**First-Year Interview and Focus-Group Findings,
Number of Sessions in Which Collaboration Among Diplomas Now Stakeholders Was Discussed,
by Implementation Theme**

| Collaborative Interactions | Implementation Themes | | | |
	Facilitators of Implementation and Examples Collaboration	Barriers to Implementation and Examples of Ineffective Collaboration	Perceived Positive Impact School Climate, Staff or Students	Lessons Learned for Future Implementation
Among Diplomas Now school-based staff members	20	12	3	23
Between Diplomas Now school-based staff and school administrators	26	15	2	19
Between Diplomas Now school-based staff and teachers	29	26	4	24
Between Diplomas Now school-based staff and students	3	2	1	4
Between Diplomas Now school-based staff and other Diplomas Now staff members[a]	7	8	0	4
Between Diplomas Now school-based staff and school district staff members	1	2	0	4

(continued)

81

Table 4.1 (continued)

SOURCES: Diplomas Now program staff, school, and district interviews and focus groups, spring 2012 and 2013.

NOTES: Data were collected at seven schools representing four districts. Data-collection activities included 49 interviews and 28 focus groups with a total of 173 participants (25 participants per school, on average).

    This table reflects the number of interviews and focus groups in which each theme was discussed. Each interview or focus group was only counted once regardless of the number of times the theme was discussed during the interview or focus group session.

    The column labeled "facilitators of implementation and examples of effective collaboration" refers to instances in which interview/focus-group respondents reported that a Diplomas Now program input facilitated collaboration, which in turn contributed to the successful implementation of the Diplomas Now model, or provided examples of collaboration that was perceived as effective. The column labeled "barriers to implementation and examples of ineffective collaboration" refers to instances in which interview/focus-group respondents reported that a Diplomas Now program input hindered collaboration, which in turn led to challenges in the implementation of the Diplomas Now model, or examples of collaboration that was perceived as ineffective. The column labeled "perceived positive impact on school or students" refers to instances in which interview/focus-group respondents described changes in school climate, student attendance, student behavior/discipline, or student course performance that they attributed to the implementation of a particular program input. The column labeled "lessons learned for future implementation" refers to instances in which interview/focus-group respondents talked about things they would have done differently, provided recommendations for other schools implementing the Diplomas Now model, described features unique to the first year of implementation, or described implications for sustaining Diplomas Now.

    [a]"Other Diplomas Now staff members" includes regional and national staff members from Diplomas Now or the individual organizations of City Year, Communities In Schools, and Talent Development (for example, instructional facilitators, school and student support services facilitators, field managers, and managing directors).

(1) among Diplomas Now school-based staff members, (2) between Diplomas Now school-based staff members and school administrators, and (3) between Diplomas Now school-based staff members and teachers. This chapter explores these three types of collaborative interactions in detail in the next three sections, followed by a fourth section on other types of collaborative interactions less frequently described by participants. As can be seen in Table 4.1, interviewees and focus-group members more often described these three types of collaborations as facilitators or examples of effective implementation than as implementation challenges. In addition, in reflecting on the first year of implementation, research participants frequently discussed "lessons learned" about how to strengthen these collaborations as implementation progresses.

Each section briefly describes important features of the interactions, followed by a discussion of the factors that facilitated or hindered relationships, including examples of successes, challenges, and lessons learned about working together to implement the Diplomas Now model. Finally, the chapter closes with a summary of contextual factors that influenced program implementation at the seven case-study schools.

Collaboration Among Diplomas Now School-Based Staff Members

As discussed in previous chapters, Diplomas Now school-based staff members include the Talent Development school transformation facilitator and instructional coaches; the City Year program manager, team leaders, and corps members; and the Communities In Schools site coordinator. They work together to facilitate whole-school reform by delivering Integrated On-Site Support and other services related to the Diplomas Now model. The school transformation facilitator guides the School Leadership Team and analyzes student data. Instructional coaches provide teacher professional development, such as training sessions and in-class guidance. School-based staff members from City Year include a program manager, who oversees City Year programs at the school; City Year corps members, who provide students with Tier II interventions and school-wide programs; and City Year team leaders, experienced corps members who assist the program manager and other corps members through peer leadership. The Communities In Schools site coordinator brokers community resources and provides student case management, often focusing on Tier III support. Each of the three partner organizations plays a role in managing Diplomas Now reform at each school, and the Diplomas Now School Leadership Team consists of the school transformation facilitator, the program manager, and the site coordinator.

The qualitative data indicate that Diplomas Now school-based staff members generally worked together to plan and accomplish shared goals. The Diplomas Now program staff survey data from 32 schools also reflect moderate to high levels of collaboration among Diplomas Now partners. Survey respondents generally reported that they could rely on each other whenever

they had a concern or issue. The survey asked Diplomas Now school-based staff members to rate the responsiveness of each Diplomas Now partner to concerns or issues, using a six-point scale (where 1 = "not at all," 2 = "a little," 3 = "to some extent," 4 = "quite a bit," 5 = "very," and 6 = "completely"). Most Diplomas Now school-based staff members (ranging from 75 percent to 94 percent across schools) reported that they could rely on the other partner organizations "quite a bit," "very," or "completely." These findings are encouraging given that the staff members from these three distinct organizations need to work together to support the implementation of multiple components of a complex whole-school reform model.

Qualitative data reveal that Diplomas Now school-based staff members worked together both formally and informally to plan for and accomplish shared goals. Formal interactions consisted of regularly scheduled meetings with agendas; informal interactions included continuing communications through impromptu discussions (sometimes text messaging) and unplanned check-ins (such as might occur when passing by each other's offices). Planning activities usually fell into the following categories:

- Preparing for events and activities (often involving City Year corps members and the Diplomas Now School Leadership Team)

- Developing instruction (for example, instructional coaches working with corps members)

- Devising strategies to meet long-term goals (often within the Diplomas Now School Leadership Team, sometimes involving the team leader)

Participants offered many examples to illustrate how Diplomas Now school-based staff members worked together. For example, the school transformation facilitator's responsibilities include providing student data to the Diplomas Now school-based staff, coordinating and leading Early Warning Indicator (EWI) meetings, and being, as one program manager stated, the "engine behind our collaboration." One school transformation facilitator noted that the program manager, site coordinator, and school transformation facilitator need to clearly delineate roles and ensure that leadership responsibilities are distributed effectively across the school-based team. This leadership function appeared essential to successful Diplomas Now implementation, given the complex interactions of multiple players. Although their collaborative role is not always clearly defined, site coordinators interact with other Diplomas Now school-based staff members by connecting students with services after EWI meetings, planning school programs, and serving as a primary point of contact when City Year corps members identify individual student needs.

The program manager often serves as the link between the Diplomas Now School Leadership Team and corps members by setting expectations for corps member responsibilities;

at many schools, the team leaders operate as extensions of the program manager in helping corps members understand their responsibilities. With the program manager focused primarily on leadership responsibilities within the school and the local area, the team leaders can help manage corps members on a frequent, often day-to-day, basis. Corps members provide "people power" and serve as a bridge between the staff and students, giving the Diplomas Now School Leadership Team and instructional coaches insight about the issues students face and serving as an important source of encouragement and accountability for students.

Four primary themes emerged from the qualitative data concerning interactions among Diplomas Now school-based staff members:

- Building trust and rapport within the Diplomas Now team may foster an effective partnership among the three partners.

- Establishing and clarifying roles early will make it easier to hold Diplomas Now school-based staff members accountable for their responsibilities.

- Assigning work spaces for Diplomas Now school-based staff members in close proximity to one another facilitates continual interaction.

- By working together, Diplomas Now school-based staff members successfully fulfill program goals shared by the three organizations, as well as program goals specific to each individual organization.

Participants often described collaboration among Diplomas Now school-based staff members as enthusiastic and positive. For example, one team leader observed, "We all work as a team and we all rely on each other for help." Participants at one school indicated strong consensus about how well Diplomas Now school-based staff members, particularly the Diplomas Now School Leadership Team, worked together as an "effective partnership" and "supportive team." During an interview, one of the administrators from this school attributed the Diplomas Now school-based staff's cohesion to the clarity of their roles and responsibilities: "Everyone knew what the next person was doing, and so it kept things seamless." The school's fidelity data (implementation rating, moderate; implementation score, 0.76; number of critical inputs implemented adequately, four; and number of all inputs implemented adequately, six) confirm that implementation was progressing well — both overall and in comparison with other Diplomas Now schools. This implies that collaboration of this nature may be essential to the successful implementation of the Diplomas Now model.

Other schools found it challenging to maintain intense collaboration throughout the year. For example, one program manager reported weekly meetings with the school transformation facilitator at first, but said that as the year passed, their interaction dwindled to brief conversations passing in the hallways. Based on responses from several participants, it seems

important to "cement" relationships among Diplomas Now school-based staff members; some participants reported that team building and open communication helped to develop trust and cultivate collaboration. As a Diplomas Now field manager noted, "The first part is more like you're feeling each other out.... Now we have the team working, and we're very transparent in our meetings. So that built trust. So we have teamwork, transparency, and trust."

Many respondents indicated the need to establish the roles and clearly define the responsibilities of Diplomas Now school-based staff members early in model implementation, thus creating norms for working together. Challenges arose in cases where Diplomas Now school-based staff members came on board after the school year began. There weren't enough people available to implement all the model components early on, and those staff members who were in place faced difficulties planning program activities and services in advance, and in collectively establishing and branding the Diplomas Now model at the school.

One school transformation facilitator observed, "I think starting off the year knowing that there wasn't really a planning year, [the planning] sort of happened as the implementation was happening, and not all the partners began in September." Early clarification of roles might address what the City Year corps members at one school articulated as their confusion about the responsibilities of the school transformation facilitator and the site coordinator. At a few schools, Diplomas Now school-based staff members reported that the site coordinator's responsibilities were not well defined; in one case, the site coordinator described not being clear about what role to play. In another case, confusion about the site coordinator's role arose because other people and organizations in the school delivered similar services; this underscored the need for Diplomas Now school-based staff members to communicate, coordinate, and integrate services with those other parties. Diplomas Now school-based staff members from two schools expressed frustration with other school-based staff members whom they perceived as not "pulling their own weight"; they emphasized the need for greater accountability and open channels to communicate such concerns.

Securing office space in close proximity to one another facilitates collaboration among Diplomas Now school-based staff members because it expedites communication, resource sharing, awareness of one another's work, and collective problem solving. Administrators and City Year corps members from one middle school and one high school noted that situating Diplomas Now school-based staff members close to one another created a central location to go for help. One administrator indicated that having the Diplomas Now school-based staff in the same location made it easy to go into that room and find someone to assist whenever it was needed. On the other hand, the program manager and site coordinator at another school shared an office, but the school transformation facilitator's office was located in a separate section of the school building, a setup that reportedly presented challenges in executing the work — specifically, limited opportunity for informal communication. In cases where shared office

space is not an option, Diplomas Now school-based staff members may need to work more actively to ensure frequent communication and opportunities for collaboration.

Although the three partner organizations share a common agenda of serving young people, planning together requires devising strategies to fulfill individual organizational goals as well as collective Diplomas Now program goals. Reported challenges included "different organizations ... working in the schoolhouse" that referred to things differently, demonstrating the need to develop a common language. Diplomas Now School Leadership Team members at some schools described how they worked together to focus on the overarching goal of student success. For example, a program manager stated, "It's not about Communities In Schools looking good, or Talent Development looking good, it's about our students receiving maximum benefits from our program." Many participants suggested more emphasis on long-term planning, which might streamline how Diplomas Now school-based staff members work together to achieve goals.

Collaboration Between Diplomas Now School-Based Staff Members and School Administrators

The Diplomas Now model seeks to supplement rather than supplant school personnel. Collaboration between Diplomas Now school-based staff members and school administrators is therefore critical to integrating the program into a school and sustaining school improvement over time. Administrators are key allies for successfully implementing Diplomas Now model components that may require modifying the school structure, such as extended periods and small learning communities.

During interviews and focus groups, both school and Diplomas Now school-based staff members described the collaboration between the Diplomas Now School Leadership Team and school administrators, including the principal and assistant principals. A school transformation facilitator explicitly distinguished between "active" and "passive" support from administrators, a difference to which others also alluded. Active engagement occurs when administrators empower Diplomas Now school-based staff members by advocating for the program and serving as a resource for its implementation. One administrator reported this approach to involving the school transformation facilitator:

> If you have outside programs in your building, you cannot isolate them. It's important that you incorporate them into the fabric of the building. And it was important that I incorporate Diplomas Now into my leadership team. Because if you're going to have anything to do with curriculum, anything to do with my students, anything to do with my teachers, you need to be involved in a leadership process.... We work together hand in hand because the support I'm getting from her — I need her support and she needs mine.

Others described school administrators who gave passive support. These administrators informed Diplomas Now school-based staff members about district or school initiatives, allowed them autonomy, and approved initiatives, both formally through signatures and informally through "walk-and-talks." As a school transformation facilitator said, "They gave us the green light to go ahead.... They gave us free rein." Some participants preferred active support and others preferred passive support. The difference may depend on context. For example, in one school where teachers' unwillingness to implement the Diplomas Now model presented a challenge, the school transformation facilitator expressed interest in more active involvement from school administrators.

Consistent with the interview and focus-group findings, the Diplomas Now school-based staff surveys reflect a moderate to high degree of support from school administrators during the first year of implementation. The survey asked Diplomas Now school-based staff members to rate the responsiveness of school administrators to concerns or issues brought to their attention, using a six-point scale (where 1 = "not at all," 2 = "a little," 3 = "to some extent," 4 = "quite a bit," 5 = "very," and 6 = "completely"). Talent Development Secondary and City Year staff members generally rated the responsiveness of school administrators in the middle to high range, with 75 percent of Talent Development Secondary and 72 percent of City Year staff members indicating that they could rely on school administrators "quite a bit," "very," or "completely."[2]

Qualitative data related to the interactions between Diplomas Now school-based staff members and school administrators suggest several factors that expedite successful collaboration:

- Maintaining the support of school administrators is better accomplished when Diplomas Now school-based staff members actively set realistic expectations for what the program will accomplish.

- Administrator investment from the beginning of implementation is essential to the viability of the Diplomas Now model.

- Diplomas Now school-based staff members benefit from being resilient during the initial challenges of implementation.

- Opportunities for administrators to network with each other and share stories related to successful reform may motivate them to engage in the program actively.

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[2]Data from Communities In Schools staff members for this item were not available for this report.

- Getting administrators to support the work of the Diplomas Now school-based staff may be a powerful influence making teachers more willing to take part in the program.

It is important that school administrators not only understand the Diplomas Now model, but set reasonable expectations for the Diplomas Now school-based staff. Some administrators reported that Diplomas Now school-based staff members were very receptive to helping when necessary, and expressed appreciation for their willingness to do things "they aren't supposed to." Diplomas Now school-based staff members at the same school, however, recommended setting boundaries with administrators; this might prevent situations where administrators ask Diplomas Now school-based staff members to engage in tasks outside of their intended responsibilities, spreading them too thin. Several Diplomas Now school-based staff members stated that they "got sucked into" activities and responsibilities not directly related to their Diplomas Now responsibilities: conducting groups for the guidance counselor, providing social work interventions, and writing pink slips for poor student behavior. Depending on the school context, Diplomas Now school-based staff members may need to determine how to strike an appropriate balance between building rapport and setting expectations.

Pillar IV — Can-Do Culture and Climate — specifies getting administrators to commit to a realistic yet optimistic vision about what the Diplomas Now program can achieve. Diplomas Now school-based staff members can play key roles in helping administrators gain that understanding. For example, one teacher confirmed the observations that Diplomas Now school-based staff members made about their school leaders' lack of understanding: "I don't feel that the administration necessarily even knows what the program should look like from one class to the next.... I found that frustrating." Similarly, one school transformation facilitator spoke about how important it is for school administrators to understand the commitment required to effect change:

> The leadership expected Diplomas Now to come in and save the day overnight, not understanding that it takes time. School transformation does not happen overnight, and for school transformation to happen you have to be willing to transform your thinking and your understanding. You have to be open to that and if you are not open to really changing the way that you think about students' achievement ... then it is not going to transform.

Not surprisingly, Diplomas Now school-based staff members said stakeholder investment was important to successful program implementation. More telling, however, were the overwhelming number of responses from a broad range of participants (school district staff members, school administrators, and teachers) about the need for support from school administrators. How administrators feel about the Diplomas Now model (whether they accept it, are neutral toward it, or reject it) is probably critical to implementation — as is how strongly they

feel about accepting or rejecting it — and Diplomas Now school-based staff members cannot assume that administrators will initially accept the program. For example, a school district staff member offered this recommendation: "You need principals buying [in] up front.... If not, they don't take ownership and then it doesn't work, no matter how well-intentioned all the players are." Interview and focus-group participants at all seven schools described at least some success getting administrators on board with the Diplomas Now model. Administrators offered a few suggestions for how a Diplomas Now school-based staff can make its administrators more willing to engage in the Diplomas Now program actively:

- Adapt to the needs of the school.

- Understand the culture of the school.

- Share information to ensure that everyone is on the same page.

- Engage all the necessary players.

Getting administrators to become actively engaged reportedly takes some time, and often does not happen easily. At one school, for example, participants reported that the previous principal resisted the Diplomas Now model; the principal "wanted something else from the program" and had a "difference of opinion" about how implementation ought to occur. As this school's transformation facilitator noted, "I think it's a disservice to everybody if a principal truly doesn't want this and it's pushed on them ... because it's not going to happen the way it's supposed to." In this case, a change in leadership presented new opportunities for the Diplomas Now school-based staff to draw attention to what the Diplomas Now model could offer the school. Many respondents from various schools described early resistance from administrators but also noted that, in time, most administrators became more enthusiastic, after seeing the changes in school climate, student behavior, and attendance that resulted from the program. According to one program manager:

> Administration was sure to point out that they were skeptical at first, but they are very pleasantly surprised at the impact that we had this year, in our first year. So I think we are in a really good place going into our second year, having the buy-in from administration and being empowered to do the work that we do ... taking it to the next level I think for next year, which is pretty exciting.

Many participants discussed the value of school administrators visiting another Diplomas Now school or meeting principals from other schools implementing the Diplomas Now model. As one site coordinator noted, these visits allow a principal to see firsthand the potential impact of the Diplomas Now program, which is likely to increase the principal's interest in its implementation at his or her school. Respondents from another school noted that taking part in the Diplomas Now Summer Institute enabled the Diplomas Now School Leadership Team and

school administrators to share the same vision coming into the school year. Additionally, one school administrator advised other school leaders to be open to "having that collaborative spirit where you don't mind having those folks come in to talk and give suggestions," a sentiment that might mitigate some of the tensions with administrators that Diplomas Now school-based staff members experienced at other schools.

Collaboration between administrators and Diplomas Now school-based staff members also appears to be a stepping stone to engaging teachers with the Diplomas Now program. For example, one school administrator commented about the principal's importance:

> The willingness for the school, the administrator to really work with [Diplomas Now] ... it was definitely the administrator who — she drives it. And not only that, she invited the staff to welcome them, the staff, many of them have welcomed them to our school and looked to them for that support.... She set the tone.

It becomes especially important for school leaders to be actively engaged in the Diplomas Now program when teacher resistance occurs, as exemplified in a scenario that one participant reported: teachers refused to attend EWI meetings and administrators did not require them to.

Collaboration Between Diplomas Now School-Based Staff Members and Teachers

As is true in many school reform models, in Diplomas Now teachers not only receive program services (instructional coaching, for example), but are also active and crucial implementers of key elements — delivering Curriculum for College Readiness, for example, and working with City Year corps members to provide in-class services to students. Schools took different approaches to the interaction between Diplomas Now school-based staff members and teachers. One program manager noted that the school transformation facilitator was the lead partner in collaborating with teachers at that school, while at other schools the entire Diplomas Now School Leadership Team exercised this responsibility. Interactions between instructional coaches and teachers also varied. Teachers in one focus group reported that coaching began on a daily basis and then shifted to weekly "random pop-ins." One school's model of weekly preclass meetings, observations, and postclass meetings was described by one teacher as "too intensive." In contrast, the instructional coaches at another school also had teaching responsibilities that limited their opportunities to engage in this type of coaching cycle.

To facilitate collaboration between Diplomas Now school-based staff members and teachers, participants recommended four approaches:

- Conduct training and discussion sessions to clarify what is expected of teachers and what resources are available.

- Clarify the role of City Year corps members and set appropriate expectations for their classroom activities.

- Continually build rapport with teachers, recognizing that some may initially oppose the Diplomas Now model.

- Publicize small successes that demonstrate how the Diplomas Now program can create desired change.

Across schools, participants reported challenges in fostering teacher understanding of the Diplomas Now model but also offered a range of strategies for doing so. Diplomas Now school-based staff members, teachers, and administrators all recommended more extensive training for teachers in the Diplomas Now model, including:

- An organizational chart to illustrate "who's who" in the Diplomas Now model

- Discussion forums to help teachers clarify their understanding of the program

- A summer retreat to introduce the Diplomas Now model to new teachers and serve as a refresher course for experienced ones

- An initial training session to explain roles and responsibilities, with a follow-up session a month later to note successes and adjustments needed

- Small group sessions to share information

- Assistance with classroom setup at the beginning of the school year to provide opportunities for one-on-one conversations about the Diplomas Now model

Many participants raised specific concerns about the clarity of the City Year corps member role, and some suggested ways to manage relationships between teachers and corps members. Although one school transformation facilitator reported having clearly defined the role of corps members to teachers in the beginning of the year, corps members at that school suggested that it would have helped if school administrators also communicated that information to teachers. One teacher described planning with a corps member to be certain that nobody "overstepped bounds." A corps member stated the importance of sensitivity in respecting a teacher's space to "avoid animosity." Navigating these often fluid relationships, according to one team leader, requires that corps members figure out how to work with teachers. Corps members expressed appreciation for other Diplomas Now school-based staff members who corrected teachers when they referred to corps members as "kids." During interviews and focus

groups, however, teachers and administrators used similar terms to refer to corps members, confirming that some do not view corps members as mature and responsible staff members of Diplomas Now.

In some cases, the interactions between corps members and teachers changed over time. For example, one corps member observed that, "It was kind of interesting for that transition to happen, because at one point you didn't want me to do anything, and now you want me to do everything." Similarly, corps members at another school articulated the intent to scale back their initially extensive involvement in student behavior management. As one commented:

> So this year we have done things like reviewing pink slips, calling homes, sending students home, things like that, and we won't do that because that's not our job. And we have been kind of sucked into that role because of lack of just staff members to do that. We won't do that next year.

Although Student Supports — including behavior management — is a Diplomas Now model input, corps members are not intended to function as a school's primary disciplinarians, as apparently occurred in this case. Another respondent noted the importance of providing concrete guidance to corps members who lack training in instructional methods, especially as they acquire more teaching responsibilities over the course of the school year. One corps member described using an information sheet on teacher engagement to start initial conversations that defined both parties' expectations from the beginning. Based on the qualitative data, it seems important that the Diplomas Now School Leadership Team equip corps members with the tools they need to advocate for themselves, and simultaneously work with administrators to explain the role of corps members to teachers.

Interview and focus-group participants across schools reported that it was difficult to get teachers invested in Diplomas Now, and that that lack of investment was a barrier to program implementation. For example, when asked which aspect of the program was most challenging to implement, a school transformation facilitator said that it was getting teachers on board at the beginning of the year. A school administrator confirmed this view, stating that it took several weeks to persuade teachers of the Diplomas Now program's importance. In other cases, this resistance increased over time, as reflected in an instructional coach's story about eventually interacting with a teacher "just for the show of working with him, but by the end of the year he completely resisted." Superficial compliance may have a negative effect on the quality of Diplomas Now program implementation, and on schools' ability to sustain the program.

The qualitative data suggest that teachers took a long time to adjust to the Diplomas Now model components in their schools and classrooms, including assistance from corps members, instructional coaching, and EWI meetings. Corps members noted that teachers,

especially the more traditional and experienced of them, "have their own agendas and their own ideas, and they don't want to try anything new, [and this] conflicts with changing the school culture." Some teachers are not open to coaching because, as one teacher stated, "They think they are perfect even though there is always room to improve."

Another area of tension at several schools was the unwillingness of teachers to attend EWI meetings, as described in Chapter 3's discussion of the Tiered Intervention Model. It was challenging to convince teachers to participate in additional activities, like EWI meetings, when they perceived their workloads as already intensive. As one program manager described, persuading teachers requires "sophisticated relationship building to win them over and make sure they are dedicated to coming each and every time." Reinforcement from administrators was also noted as an effective strategy to ensure teachers attended these meetings. On the other hand, administrators at two schools reported that the implementation of the Diplomas Now program became an impetus to establish teacher team meetings and a formal, regularly scheduled opportunity to discuss student progress, work together, and connect with Diplomas Now school-based staff members. Other respondents noted that EWI meetings provided opportunities for teachers to talk about students and get on the same page — a model one participant recommended be expanded to other grades. Overall, the findings indicate that although some teachers are less amenable than others to intervention from Diplomas Now school-based staff members, effective communication about the benefits of the model can persuade many to accept the program.

Diplomas Now school-based staff members at one school reported that because teachers were interested in the program from the outset, both school and Diplomas Now school-based staff members accomplished more than planned. At this school, Diplomas Now school-based staff members created relationships with teachers at the beginning of the year by meeting with them to hash out questions, concerns, and problems. Respondents from other schools described strategies to garner teacher interest in the program, including intensive efforts to win teachers over. For example, one program manager reported that the Diplomas Now school-based staff secured the commitment of initially skeptical teachers by having "to bend over backwards a lot at the beginning of the year." A few participants noted that effective leadership and rapport building persuaded teachers that Diplomas Now could become a real resource for improvement rather than just "another thing on their plates." As one school transformation facilitator explained:

> If [teachers] don't believe in it and see the value in it and feel supported in it, then you don't even have a shot at getting it off the ground. So I really wanted to make sure that I was supporting teachers in the beginning and making sure that I was a resource for them.

Diplomas Now staff members at one school staged events such as honorary breakfasts to show their appreciation for teachers, and deployed the Diplomas Now program logo and banners to encourage more familiarity with the program inside the school. One instructional coach summarized what other participants described as the value of building rapport: "Relationships are everything. If you don't have those relationships, then you will meet lots of resistance, depending on the teachers and their comfort level."

Drawing attention to small successes can raise teachers' interest in implementing the Diplomas Now model. For teachers to sustain their ownership in the program, they need to see results. According to one school transformation facilitator:

> They need to know that this is teacher-based and teacher-driven work ... that we are outside partners coming into a school, but at the end of the day, we're helping to organize the school in a way that gives them more leadership.

One team leader told the story of a previously resistant teacher who heard about the impact of the program at the EWI meetings, and subsequently became much more open to working with corps members. Teachers reported directly that corps members had helped them reach struggling students with whom they could not connect. One school transformation facilitator confirmed that:

> Once [teachers] saw that our work was valid, and once we proved our levels of proficiency, and that what we do really matters, and it counts, and it's very helpful not only to the students but to them — they were willing to do whatever it took to assist us and help us out with making certain things happen.

These findings about collaboration between Diplomas Now school-based staff members and teachers may benefit others. Knowing what challenges they might encounter, Diplomas Now school-based staff members can plan to lessen the concerns that teachers are likely to have, and patiently execute strategies to achieve their support over time.

Other Findings About Collaborative Dynamics

Although most of the qualitative data concerned the collaborative interactions already discussed in this chapter, to a lesser degree participants did reflect on other collaborative dynamics. This section describes interactions between Diplomas Now school-based staff members and students, between school-based staff members and other Diplomas Now staff members, and between school-based staff members and school district staff members. It also describes some contextual factors that influence collaborative dynamics.

Diplomas Now school-based staff members engage with students by working together to deliver Integrated On-Site Support through a tiered intervention model. However, respond-

ents indicated that it is primarily City Year corps members who have frequent, direct interactions with students. Their interactions include individual student support services and Tier II interventions (for example, tutoring, in-class support, and behavioral management), as well as whole-school support services (for example, school-wide activities and attendance calls to parents). Across all seven schools, students offered in-depth accounts of their interactions with corps members when asked about the Diplomas Now program. In other words, corps members were the most visible aspect of the program to students. Students reported that: "They [corps members] go farther than what we do in class.... If you have a question on it, they'll talk to you about it and try to explain it," and "They sit there and just listen.... They'll give you time and they'll let you cry in a little corner in their classroom." A school administrator added that:

> [Corps members] have several, quite a few, gatherings in the auditorium. They were able to cheer on the students, talk about their success, commend them for their hard work, and identify several young people that were exceptional.

One site coordinator offered this example of one-on-one interactions between Diplomas Now school-based staff members and students:

> [Students] share a lot of information with us as to what's going on around them — classroom issues, teacher issues, home issues, whatever is going on they come to me, and they're able to open up and share with me a lot.

The interviews and focus groups indicate that Diplomas Now school-based staff members should consider the ways they can capitalize on the role of corps members to understand student needs and respond to them.

Collaboration between the Diplomas Now School Leadership Team and other Diplomas Now staff members — the Diplomas Now Implementation Support Team, Diplomas Now Local Executive Team, and Diplomas Now school-based staff members from other schools — promotes program implementation through helpful discussions and resource sharing. For example, two school transformation facilitators described their school and student support services facilitator, who is part of the Diplomas Now Local Executive Team, as helpful and supportive. One school transformation facilitator observed:

> He comes in and he is always hands-on, big on teaming.... He has always given us our best practices for those types of things, whether it is from readings or whether it's from things at some of his other schools.

Program managers at two schools indicated that collaboration with other program managers in their district was helpful because it provided the opportunity to compare the lessons they had learned and the practices that had been effective for them. One of them, however, indicated that the regional meetings where this collaboration occurred also presented challenges because they meant time away from the school. Instructional coaches at two schools mentioned

collaborating with other coaches in their school districts. Across all four districts, participants spoke of the important role played by instructional facilitators (part of the Diplomas Now local support system for multiple implementing schools within a district) in implementing the program, because of their detailed understanding of the model. Instructional facilitators' responsibilities included coaching the school-level instructional coaches and, in cases where instructional coaches were not well received by teachers, coaching the teachers directly. One school transformation facilitator asserted that the instructional facilitators, who visited twice a month, "are a huge help. At times now it almost gets to where it's a little overused, but at the beginning of the year it was a huge resource that we definitely utilized." On the other hand, a school administrator from another school wanted more frequent visits, stating that, "Instructional facilitator support is really critical." Based on the findings from the qualitative data, effective assistance from local Diplomas Now staff members not based in the school was at times a helpful supplement to the Diplomas Now school-based team.

Qualitative data indicate that Diplomas Now school-based staff members obtained the backing of district leaders in three out of the four school districts. However, Diplomas Now school-based staff surveys from the 32 Diplomas Now schools reflect lower levels of perceived district support. The survey asked Diplomas Now staff members to rate the responsiveness of their school districts using a six-point scale (where 1 = "not at all," 2 = "a little," 3 = "to some extent," 4 = "quite a bit," 5 = "very," and 6 = "completely"). Talent Development Secondary and City Year staff members rated school district responsiveness in the lower range, with 44 percent of Talent Development Secondary staff members and 53 percent of City Year staff members reporting that they could rely on their school districts to respond to their concerns "quite a bit," "very," or "completely."[3]

When district leaders are interested in the Diplomas Now model, they may take opportunities to share success stories with other school leaders. For example, one school transformation facilitator described how at a district meeting a district leader discussed the success the school had had with report card conferences. A district staff member commented that the district could improve its communication with school administrators about the Diplomas Now model:

> One thing we could do better as a district in partnership with Diplomas Now is training up front to clearly outline what is the role of Communities In Schools, what is the role of Talent Development Secondary, and what is the role of City Year in improving the conditions for your kids.

One of the roles of a Diplomas Now Local Executive Team is to help ensure that the work of school-based Diplomas Now staff members is responsive to the district context and

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[3]Data from Communities In Schools staff members for this item were not available for this report.

aligned with district goals. The Diplomas Now field manager from one school described efforts "to make sure that not only are we implementing the Diplomas Now model, but we are, if you will, vertically aligned to the district vision and goals." The Local Executive Team can also advocate with district administrators in support of school-level reforms that are part of the Diplomas Now model. For example, coaxing from the Local Executive Team might help change the mind of a school district staff member who is not interested in adopting the Diplomas Now curriculum.

Contextual factors, such as staff stability and resources, are significant because they relate to collaboration and overall implementation. Schools experiencing staff turnover and layoffs, whether recent or anticipated, had difficulty engaging teachers in the Diplomas Now program. Replacement of school administrators could be an asset or a liability, depending on the support that the former and current leaders gave to the Diplomas Now program. As one school administrator commented:

> [The school] had some difficulties previously, and those areas were addressed; there's a new administration in place as well as a number of new teachers, and everyone is really on board and working toward changing the dynamics of the school.

District-driven transitions, such as pending school closures, budget cuts, and restructuring, may make teachers and administrators preoccupied with uncertainty and less vested in school reforms such as the Diplomas Now program. One teacher weighed in about this topic:

> With budget cuts, and not being able to have as many resources, I mean, I know that's on everybody's mind right now. So it is not what can be improved, but what are we going to do without? How are we going to keep even the same standards we have now with no money and no teachers and no support?

In schools with particularly negative climates (because of either low teacher morale or poor student behavior or both), Diplomas Now school-based staff members faced extraordinary difficulties in promoting school improvement.

Although the Diplomas Now model brings an influx of individuals into schools, respondents asked for other resources as well, such as data-system access, transportation to and from Diplomas Now program events, and designated space for after-school activities. Some of these challenges are out of the hands of the Diplomas Now school-based staff, as one site coordinator explained, "Transportation is a huge issue.... That's something simple that we really don't have any control over, but another big hurdle for us." Although some contextual factors are within the influence of the Diplomas Now model, Diplomas Now school-based staff members would benefit from considering the other contextual factors that they cannot influence, and the implications of those factors for program implementation.

Summary

The findings presented throughout this chapter suggest that the collaborative dynamics related to the Diplomas Now model are both complex to navigate and critical to the successful implementation of the program. Two aspects of collaboration appeared to be most important across schools and various role groups: investment and role clarity. Administrators and teachers are key stakeholders whose engagement in implementing the Diplomas Now model inputs is essential. In order to become actively engaged, it is important that they understand the model through activities such as information sessions or meeting school staff members at other Diplomas Now schools. It is vital that Diplomas Now school-based staff members establish their purposes and roles, with teachers and administrators as well as among themselves; it is particularly helpful if administrators set a good tone and reinforce those expectations with teachers. It is challenging to integrate the goals of three partner organizations with those of a school and a district, and it can only be achieved if the main players work together toward their common purpose: improved individual student outcomes and school climate. Continual communication, including regular formal meetings and informal check-ins, helps build the trust and acceptance necessary for this collaboration.

Diplomas Now is not unique in the challenges it faces as an external group coming into a school building, but the multiple partner organizations involved ensure that these challenges are considerable. That is, while the Diplomas Now reform model seeks strength from a partnership of organizations that provide complementary programs to schools, it also faces the challenge of increasing the amount of collaboration that needs to happen to get the model in place. Lessons from the first year of implementation, especially those regarding investment and role clarity, are consistent with previous research on school turnaround efforts that rely on many individuals working together in the name of student success.[4] Effective collaboration is at the core of most, if not all, school reform. Other organizations engaged in similarly complex interactions with schools may benefit from the findings discussed in this chapter, such as insights about cultivating the active engagement of key players in schools, rolling out the program, coordinating services, setting clear expectations, and communicating effectively.

Although this round of data analysis provided many insights about the launch of the Diplomas Now model, practical suggestions for how to address some of these challenges will probably emerge in subsequent years. The continuing implementation research will examine how Diplomas Now stakeholders have worked to overcome initial difficulties with implementation, and consider how to sustain program efforts over time.

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[4]Berends, Kirby, Naftel, and McKelvey (2001); Lachman and Wlodarczyk (2011); Rowan, Correnti, Miller, and Camburn (2009); Smylie and Evans (2006); Spillane, Gomez, and Mesler (2009).

Conclusion

Over the course of the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years, 32 secondary schools across 11 school districts took on the challenge of implementing the Diplomas Now whole-school reform model. Designed to reduce the number of students who drop out and provide students with a college- and career-preparatory education, the Diplomas Now model brings multiple interventions to a school in a tiered, data-driven format supported by a team of staff members from the three Diplomas Now partner organizations: Talent Development Secondary, City Year, and Communities In Schools. At the same time, 62 secondary schools across the same 11 school districts (including the 32 schools implementing Diplomas Now) have begun participating in a national evaluation of the implementation and impact of Diplomas Now. This report is the first of three planned as part of this evaluation. It has introduced readers to the Diplomas Now partner organizations and the Diplomas Now school reform model. It has also provided initial background on the nature of the evaluation and described the sample of participating schools. The 62 participating schools serve students from low-income communities where there are challenges both within and outside of school that put many students' progress to high school graduation at risk. These schools represent the kinds of schools in which the Diplomas Now organizations seek to work, and for which the model was designed. The schools were randomly assigned to implement the Diplomas Now model (DN schools) or to continue with or pursue other school improvement strategies (non-DN schools). Initial analyses confirm that randomization has resulted, as expected, in two comparable groups of schools. This "gold standard" evaluation design will allow the evaluation team to assess the *impact* of Diplomas Now on key predictors of students' later graduation: attendance, behavior, and course performance.

Furthermore, the evaluation is also studying the *implementation* of the Diplomas Now model. This report has presented findings about the first year of implementation in terms of the fidelity of model implementation and the nature of collaborations that undergird that implementation. Complex, multifaceted whole-school reforms like Diplomas Now typically take a few years to reach full implementation. After the first year of implementation, analyses of implementation fidelity — how similar the model is "on the ground" to the model as designed — suggest that overall, model implementation in the 32 DN schools has gotten moving and has gained traction. However, the DN schools have struggled to implement some of the aspects of the model that the Diplomas Now organizations believe are most critical.

DN schools were most successful this first year in adapting a tiered intervention model and incorporating additional student support services like tutoring and after-school programs. This result may reflect the fact that both of these components offered new resources to the schools and came with extensive support from the Diplomas Now staff, circumstances likely to facilitate their implementation. Implementing these aspects of the model in a school required three distinct organizations to partner with each other — a notable accomplishment for the first

year of implementation, given that the local staff members of those organizations were partnering for the first time and needed to execute both shared, cross-organizational tasks and complementary, organization-specific ones. However, DN schools saw less success introducing new curricula and peer coaching models. Both these components require that teachers and administrators be willing to change a school's culture and practices. Reform of this nature is likely to require that the Diplomas Now staff invest time in building trust and understanding with a school's staff before many of the school staff's members will welcome these new models. Before Diplomas Now, some of the schools had engaged in reforms with similar structural, curricular, or programmatic features, but survey data indicate that fewer than half had previously adopted a reform model created or managed by external organizations. This inexperience might explain some of the challenges they faced.

As discussed in this chapter, confusion about the roles and responsibilities of Diplomas Now staff members and partner organizations may have hindered some aspects of implementation during the first year. Clarifying and establishing roles and responsibilities as early as possible in the school year promotes cohesion and accountability among the Diplomas Now school-based staff members. Effectively communicating what Diplomas Now entails for a school and its personnel, and offering examples of successful outcomes — including site visits to other DN schools — may garner the interest and commitment of administrators and teachers. Offering assistance to improve a school by doing "whatever needs to be done" is one way for Diplomas Now staff members to encourage administrators and teachers to engage with the model, but it can lead to staff members taking on tasks that have little to do with their real responsibilities. Depending on the school context, Diplomas Now staff members may need to seek an appropriate balance between building rapport and setting limits.

The evaluation team will continue to study Diplomas Now implementation, and will provide an update about how implementation develops over time in the next report. In addition, the evaluation team will present findings about what changes Diplomas Now may be causing in DN schools compared with non-DN schools, and whether model implementation is beginning to have an impact on student and school staff attitudes and school-related behaviors.

Appendix A

Baseline Administrator and Teacher Survey Response Rates and Measure Creation

This appendix includes supplementary materials for the baseline administrator and teacher survey analyses found in Chapter 2. The first section presents the response rates for the baseline administrator and teacher surveys, and the second section describes the creation of measures used in the baseline survey analyses where more than one survey item was combined.

Baseline Survey Response Rates

The survey was administered online to teachers and administrators (principals and assistant principals) in all study schools during the fall of the first year of implementation (2011 for wave 1 schools and 2012 for wave 2 schools). The survey asked if respondents were working at the school during the prior school year. Those respondents who were present at the school during the prior year were then asked a variety of questions about their experiences at the school during that year (see the *Data Collection Instrument Supplement* for copies of the surveys).[1] Table A.1 describes the overall response rate for each survey, among study schools assigned to implement the Diplomas Now model (DN schools) and study schools not assigned to implement it (non-DN schools).

Some schools were omitted from these analyses due to missing data. Sixteen schools were dropped from the administrator survey analyses, including: 1) eight schools where none of the administrators who responded to the survey were present during the prior year, 2) five schools in random assignment blocks where all of the DN schools or all of the non-DN schools were dropped due to missing data,[2] and 3) three schools where data were lost after collection. Six schools were dropped from the teacher survey analyses, including: 1) two schools where none of the administrators who responded to the survey were present in the study school during the prior year, 2) one school in a random assignment block where all of the DN schools or all of the non-DN schools were dropped due to missing data, and 3) three schools where data were lost after collection. The second row in each panel of Table A.1 lists the administrator and teacher response rates for the schools included in the analysis. Of these respondents, only administrators and teachers who were at the schools during the prior school year were included in the analyses. The final row in each panel lists the percentage of respondents who were working at the school during the prior school year.

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[1]The *Data Collection Instrument Supplement* to this report, Corrin et al. (2014), is available at www.mdrc.org.
[2]Since there was no comparison, the entire random assignment block was dropped.

Diplomas Now

Table A.1

Baseline Administrator and Teacher Survey Response Rates

Rates (%)	DN Schools	Non-DN Schools	All Study Schools
Panel A: administrators			
Overall response rate	83.3	80.3	81.9
Sample size	120	117	237
Response rate among schools in the analysis sample[a]	85.7	86.0	85.9
Survey respondents present during the prior school year[b]	75.0	73.8	74.4
Sample size	98	93	191
Panel B: teachers			
Overall response rates	77.4	79.5	78.4
Sample size	1,677	1,700	3,377
Response rates among schools in the analysis sample[a]	79.4	83.6	81.5
Survey respondents present during the prior school year[b,c]	76.5	78.1	77.3
Sample size	1,625	1,598	3,223

SOURCES: Baseline administrator and teacher surveys administered in fall 2011 (wave 1 schools) and fall 2012 (wave 2 schools).

NOTES: [a]There were 16 schools dropped from the administrator survey analyses and 6 schools dropped from the teacher survey analyses due to missing data.

[b]The baseline surveys were administered during the fall of the first implementation year, but the items used in the baseline analyses (Tables 2.4 through 2.7) asked administrators and teachers about their experiences during the prior school year. Only administrators and teachers that were at their schools during the prior year were included in these analyses. These values display the rate at which survey respondents were present in the prior school year among schools in the analysis sample.

[c]There were 31 survey respondents who reported their roles at their schools as something other than teacher (that is, they were counselors or other school staff members). These respondents were excluded from this calculation and from the analysis. Seven of these respondents were from DN schools and 24 were from non-DN schools.

Baseline Survey Measure Creation and Factor Analysis

Tables 2.4 through 2.7 in Chapter 2 compare DN and non-DN schools in measures of school structure, programming, curriculum, and culture in the year prior to the start of the evaluation. These tables present the average percentages of administrators and teachers in DN and non-DN schools who answered each item in the affirmative. In most cases, single survey items were used in the analyses. For a few measures, items were combined to create a construct. The following discussion describes those cases where responses across several items were averaged to create a combined measure.

Administrator Survey Items

Table 2.6 includes the administrator survey measure: "A school-wide behavior management system existed at the school." The value for the construct was coded as 1 if the average of the following items was between 4 and 5 ("agree" to "strongly agree"); otherwise the value was coded as 0. (Eight items, Cronbach's alpha = 0.88.)

> During the [prior] school year, to what extent would you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your school?
>
> Teachers consistently enforced rules for student behavior in their classrooms.
>
> Teachers helped maintain discipline in the entire school, not just their own classrooms (e.g., helping students transition between classes).
>
> The school had an effective system for providing positive reinforcement to students who met behavior expectations.
>
> The school had an effective system for responding to problem behaviors.
>
> The school had an effective system for tracking office referrals and problem behaviors.
>
> Students received instruction and guidance on school discipline policies and procedures.
>
> Educators conducted functional assessments and implemented individualized behavior plans as needed.
>
> Students with frequent disruptive behavior received a daily check in with an adult to monitor their progress in meeting behavior goals as needed.
>
> (Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Table 2.7 includes the administrator survey measure: "Parents/guardians and community members were involved in school activities, helped make school decisions, and supported

school reform efforts." The value for the construct was coded as 1 if the average of the following items was between 4 and 5 ("agree" to "strongly agree"); otherwise the value was coded as 0. (Three items, Cronbach's alpha = 0.91.)

> To what extent would you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your school during the [prior] school year?
>
> Parents/guardians and community members were involved in school activities.
>
> Parents/guardians and community members were involved in decisions about school initiatives.
>
> Parents/guardians and community members supported school reform efforts (planned or implemented).
>
> (Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Teacher Survey Items

Table 2.6 includes the teacher survey measure: "Interdisciplinary teams reviewed data on individual students' academic progress, course performance, attendance, and behavior to identify students' needs and determine appropriate responses." The value for the construct was coded as 1 if the average of the following items was between 4 and 5 ("agree" to "strongly agree"); otherwise the value was coded as 0. (Five items, Cronbach's alpha = 0.96.)

> To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your experiences at this school during the [prior] school year?
>
> Interdisciplinary teams reviewed data on individual student's academic progress to identify student needs.
>
> Interdisciplinary teams reviewed data on individual student's attendance to identify student needs.
>
> Interdisciplinary teams reviewed data on individual student's behavior to identify student needs.
>
> Interdisciplinary teams reviewed data on individual student's course performance to identify student needs.
>
> Interdisciplinary teams determined approaches to respond to identified student needs.
>
> (Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Table 2.7 includes the teacher survey measure: "Teachers were involved in decisions about school policies, supported school reform efforts, and in general, had positive morale." The value for the construct was coded as 1 if the average of the following items was between 4 and 5 ("agree" to "strongly agree"); otherwise the value was coded as 0. (Three items, Cronbach's alpha = 0.82.)

> To what extent would you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your experiences at this school during the [prior] school year?
>
> Teachers were involved in decisions about school policies.
>
> A majority of teachers supported school reform efforts (planned or implemented).
>
> In general, morale among staff was positive.
>
> (Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Table 2.7 also includes the teacher survey item: "Students were respectful to peers and teachers, maintained academic integrity, took responsibility for their own learning, paid attention, and did their schoolwork." The value for the construct was coded as 1 if the average of the following items was between 4 and 5 ("agree" to "strongly agree"); otherwise the value was coded as 0. (Nine items, Cronbach's alpha = 0.92.)

> To what extent would you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about experiences with your students during the [prior] school year?
>
> Students communicated with their peers in a respectful manner most of the time.
>
> Students communicated with me in a respectful manner most of the time.
>
> Students took responsibility for their own learning most of the time.
>
> Students maintained academic honesty on tests or written exams most of the time.
>
> Students appeared to take pride in their schoolwork most of the time.
>
> Students put forth effort to understand difficult material most of the time.
>
> Students appeared to pay attention during my instruction most of the time.
>
> Students remained on task during self-directed activities most of the time.
>
> Students completed their assignments most of the time.
>
> (Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Appendix B

Program and School Staff Survey Response Rates and Fidelity Matrix

This appendix includes supplementary information on the program and school staff surveys and on the fidelity matrix, both discussed in Chapter 3. Table B.1 provides the response counts for each of the program staff surveys (Diplomas Now Implementation Support Team, school transformation facilitator, City Year program manager, and Communities In Schools site coordinator) and the counts of respondents to the follow-up administrator and teacher surveys. Table B.2 is the fidelity matrix used for the analyses found in Tables 3.3 through 3.5.

Diplomas Now

Table B.1

First-Year Follow-Up Program and School Staff Survey Response Counts

Data Sources	DN Middle Schools		DN High Schools		All DN Schools	
	Total Respondents	Total Schools	Total Respondents	Total Schools	Total Respondents	Total Schools
Program staff surveys						
Diplomas Now Implementation Support Team survey	17	17	15	15	32	32
School transformation facilitator survey	17	17	15	15	32	32
City Year program manager survey	17	17	15	15	32	32
Communities In Schools site coordinator survey and service records	17	17	15	15	32	32
School staff surveys[a]						
Administrator surveys	38	16	56	15	94	31
All 6th- and 9th-grade teacher surveys	254	17	488	15	742	32
Core 6th- and 9th-grade teacher surveys	172	17	313	15	485	32
6th- and 9th-grade English/language arts teacher surveys	76	17	95	15	171	32
6th- and 9th-grade math teacher surveys	57	16	90	14	147	30
Sample size	NA	17	NA	15	NA	32

SOURCES: Diplomas Now fidelity of implementation program staff surveys administered in spring 2012 and 2013, and school staff (administrator and teacher) surveys administered in spring 2012 and 2013.

NOTES: "Core" academic areas are identified as math, English/language arts, sciences, and social studies.

[a]Two middle schools consisted only of seventh and eighth grade and did not include a sixth grade. In these instances seventh-grade teacher data were used in lieu of sixth-grade data.

Table B.2

Diplomas Now Fidelity of Implementation Matrix

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Pillar I. Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities: Strong Learning Environments						
Site-based team standards	Site-based team (administrator, school transformation facilitator, project manager, and site coordinator) standards for collaboration, communication, and decision making	STF	0: Not in place 1: Partially/in process 2: In place	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	No	96.9
Site-based team meetings	Brief meetings for site-based team to review program implementation (approx. 30 minutes)	STF	0: Once a month or less 1: Biweekly 2: Weekly or more frequently	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	78.1
4x4 block (high school only)	4 class periods of 75 to 90 minutes that meet daily (or at least 4 days a week)	STF	0: No 1: Hybrid/acceptable alternative 2: Yes	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	86.7
Extended class periods (middle school only)	70- to 90-minute class periods for core academic classes	STF	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	52.9
Small learning communities	Interdisciplinary teams of teachers who work with the same small group of students	STF	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	68.8

(continued)

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Pillar I. Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities: Strong Learning Environments						
Interdisciplinary teacher team meetings	Meetings where interdisciplinary core teachers discuss shared students	STF	0: Do not/rarely occur 1: Occur monthly 2: Occur biweekly 3: Occur weekly 4: Occur multiple times a week 5: Occur daily	4 = Adequate 5 = High fidelity	Yes	25.0
Pillar II. Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development: Curriculum for College Readiness						
9th-grade success academy (high school only)	Separate academy for 9th-graders with its own administrators, teachers, counselors, etc.	STF	0: Not offered 1: Offered	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	60.0
School climate program (middle school only)	Reform program on school climate for middle school students	STF	0: Not offered 1: Offered in 6th grade only 2: Offered in both 6th and 7th grades 3: Offered in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	No	41.2
Mastering the Middle Grades (middle school only)	Reform curriculum on school success skills for middle school students	STF	0: Not offered 1: Offered in 6th grade only 2: Offered in both 6th and 7th grades 3: Offered in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	No	11.8

(continued)

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Pillar II. Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development: Curriculum for College Readiness						
Freshman seminar (high school only)	Seminar offered to 9th-grade students during their first semester	STF	0: Not offered 1: Offered	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	73.3
Freshman seminar availability (high school only)	Number of units of the freshman seminar offered to 9th-grade students	STF	0: none 1: 1 unit 2: 2 units 3: 3 units 8: 8 units	6 = Adequate 8 = High fidelity	No	46.7
Common Core State Standards in mathematics (middle school only)	High implementation of Common Core Standards in mathematics	STF	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	76.5
Evidence-based mathematics curriculum (middle school only)	Reform mathematics curriculum for middle school students	STF	0: Not offered 1: Not offered, but an adequate alternative offered 2: Offered	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	No	58.8
Transitions to Advanced Mathematics (high school only)	Reform mathematics curriculum for 9th-grade students	STF	0: Not offered 1: Offered	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	60.0
Transitions to Advanced Mathematics availability (high school only)	Classes that meet at least 4 times per week for at least 70 minutes per meeting	STF	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	46.7

(continued)

Table B.2 (continued)

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Pillar II. Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development: Curriculum for College Readiness						
Geometry Foundations (high school only)	Reform mathematics curriculum for 10th-grade students	STF	0: Not offered 1: Offered	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	13.3
Geometry Foundations availability (high school only)	Classes that meet at least 4 times per week for at least 70 minutes per meeting	STF	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	13.3
Algebra Foundations II (high school only)	Reform mathematics curriculum for 11th-grade students	STF	0: Not offered 1: Offered	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	0.0
Algebra Foundations II availability (high school only)	Classes that meet at least 4 times per week for at least 70 minutes per meeting	STF	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	0.0
Computer and Team Assisted Mathematics Acceleration (CATAMA) (middle school only)	Reform mathematics curriculum that provides additional instruction and support to underprepared middle school students	STF	0: Not offered 1: Not offered, but an adequate alternative offered 2: Offered	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	No	29.4
CATAMA (high school only)	Reform mathematics curriculum that provides additional instruction and support to underprepared high school students	STF	0: Not offered 1: Not offered, but an adequate alternative offered 2: Offered	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	No	20.0

(continued)

Table B.2 (continued)

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Pillar II. Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development: Curriculum for College Readiness						
Student Team Literature (middle school only)	Reform English/language arts curriculum for middle school students	STF	0: Not offered 1: Not offered, but an adequate alternative offered 2: Offered	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	41.2
Savvy Readers' Lab (middle school only)	Reform English/language arts curriculum for middle school students	STF	0: Not offered 1: Not offered, but an adequate alternative offered 2: Offered	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	41.2
Strategic Reading (high school only)	Reform reading curriculum for 9th-grade students	STF	0: Not offered 1: Offered	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	60.0
Strategic Reading availability (high school only)	Classes that meet at least 4 times per week for at least 70 minutes per meeting	STF	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	46.7
Reading and Writing in Your Career (high school only)	Reform reading and writing curriculum for 10th-grade students	STF	0: Not offered 1: Offered	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	0.0
Reading and Writing in Your Career availability (high school only)	Classes that meet at least 4 times per week for at least 70 minutes per meeting	STF	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	0.0
College Prep Reading and Writing (high school only)	Reform reading and writing curriculum for 11th-grade students	STF	0: Not offered 1: Offered	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	0.0

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Pillar II. Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development: Curriculum for College Readiness						
College Prep Reading and Writing availability (high school only)	Classes that meet at least 4 times per week for at least 70 minutes per meeting	STF	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	0.0
Accelerating Literacy for Adolescents (ALFA) Lab (high school only)	Intensive literacy support for 9th-grade students who are significantly below grade level	STF	0: Not offered 1: Not offered, but an adequate alternative offered 2: Offered	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	No	13.3
Pillar II. Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development: Professional Development and Peer Coaching						
Freshman seminar teacher support (high school only)	Professional development and job-embedded support for freshman seminar teachers	STF	0: Not provided 1: Provided 2: Provided by school and student support services (S4) facilitator 3: Provided by school transformation facilitator	1-2 = Adequate 3 = High fidelity	No	73.3
Instructional coaching for mathematics teachers	Periods of support per week provided to mathematics teachers by math coaches	STF	0: Less than 1 period per teacher 1: 1 period per teacher 2: 2 periods per teacher	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	59.4
Instructional coaching cycle completed with mathematics teachers	Instructional coaching cycle (plan, coteach, model, and debrief) completed by mathematics coach with teachers	STF	0: Did not occur 1: Occurred annually 2: Occurred semiannually 3: Occurred monthly 4: Occurred biweekly 5: Occurred weekly	4 = Adequate 5 = High fidelity	No	40.6

(continued)

120

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Pillar II. Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development: Professional Development and Peer Coaching						
Instructional coaching for English/language arts teachers	Periods of support per week provided to English/language arts teachers by English/language arts coaches	STF	0: Less than 1 period per teacher 1: 1 period per teacher 2: 2 periods per teacher	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	62.5
Instructional coaching cycle completed with English/language arts teachers	Instructional coaching cycle (plan, coteach, model, and debrief) completed by English/language arts coach with teachers	STF	0: Did not occur 1: Occurred annually 2: Occurred semiannually 3: Occurred monthly 4: Occurred biweekly 5: Occurred weekly	4 = Adequate 5+ = High fidelity	No	40.6
Pillar III. Tiered Student Supports: Tiered Intervention Model						
Coordinated Early Warning Indicator (EWI) system	Data system that tracks student attendance, behavior, and course performance and alerts teachers as students begin to fall off the graduation track	STF	0: No EWI system in place 1: In place but needs improvement 2: In place and is timely, complete, accurate, and available	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	93.8
Collaborative interdisciplinary EWI team meetings	Interdisciplinary teacher meetings to discuss students demonstrating off-track indicators	STF	0: Occurred monthly or less 1: Occurred biweekly 2: Occurred weekly	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	90.6
Tiered intervention model	A plan for integrating the use of the EWI system and scheduling EWI meetings	STF	0: Not in place 1: In place	1 = Adequate/high fidelity	No	75.0

(continued)

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Pillar III. Tiered Student Supports: Student Supports						
Mathematics classroom support	Additional in-class support from City Year corps members offered in mathematics classrooms year-round	PM	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	100.0
Mathematics classroom support: percentage of City Year corps	Percentage of City Year corps members embedded in mathematics classrooms	PM	0: 0-24% 1: 25-49% 2: 50-74% 3: 75-99% 4: 100%	3 = Adequate 4 = High fidelity	Yes	62.5
Mathematics classroom support frequency	Frequency of City Year corps members in mathematics classrooms: weekly average	PM	0: Does not occur 1: 1 time per week 2: 2 times per week 3: 3 times per week 4: 4 times per week	3 = Adequate 4 = High fidelity	Yes	100.0
Mathematics classroom support: percentage of classrooms	Percentage of math classrooms with embedded City Year corps members	PM	0: 0-24% 1: 25-49% 2: 50-74% 3: 75-99% 4: 100%	3 = Adequate 4 = High fidelity	Yes	40.6
English/language arts classrooms support	Additional in-class support from City Year corps members offered in English/language arts classrooms year-round	PM	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	100.0
English/language arts classrooms support: percentage of City Year corps	Percentage of City Year corps members embedded in English/language arts classrooms	PM	0: 0-24% 1: 25-49% 2: 50-74% 3: 75-99% 4: 100%	3 = Adequate 4 = High fidelity	Yes	65.6

(continued)

122

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Pillar III. Tiered Student Supports: Student Supports						
English/language arts classrooms support frequency	Frequency of City Year corps members in English/language arts classrooms: weekly average	PM	0: Does not occur 1: 1 time per week 2: 2 times per week 3: 3 times per week 4: 4 times per week	3 = Adequate 4 = High fidelity	Yes	100.0
English/language arts classroom support: percentage of classrooms	Percentage of English/language arts classrooms with embedded City Year corps members	PM	0: 0-24% 1: 25-49% 2: 50-74% 3: 75-99% 4: 100%	3 = Adequate 4 = High fidelity	Yes	50.0
Mathematics tutoring structure	Mathematics tutoring structure and schedule	PM	0: Not in place 1: In place	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	71.9
City Year corps integration into mathematics tutoring structure	Integration of City Year corps members into mathematics tutoring structure	PM	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	62.5
Mathematics tutoring: number of students	Number of students receiving mathematics tutoring per City Year corps member	PM	0: 0 students 1: 1-3 students 2: 4-6 students 3: 7-10 students 4: More than 10 students	3 = Adequate 4 = High fidelity	Yes	50.0
Literacy tutoring structure	Literacy tutoring structure and schedule	PM	0: Not in place 1: In place	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	75.0
City Year corps integration into literacy tutoring structure	Integration of City Year corps members into literacy tutoring structure	PM	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	59.4

(continued)

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Pillar III. Tiered Student Supports: Student Supports						
Literacy tutoring: number of students	Number of students receiving literacy tutoring per City Year corps member	PM	0: 0 students 1: 1-3 students 2: 4-6 students 3: 7-10 students 4: More than 10 students	3 = Adequate 4 = High fidelity	Yes	59.4
Attendance support structure	Integration of City Year corps members into school attendance program	PM	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	71.9
Attendance coaching	Number of students receiving attendance coaching per City Year corps member	PM	0: 0 students 1: 1-3 students 2: 4-6 students 3: 7-10 students 4: More than 10 students	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	93.8
Behavior coaching	Number of students receiving behavior coaching per City Year corps member	PM	0: 0 students 1: 1-3 students 2: 4-6 students 3: 7-10 students 4: More than 10 students	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	93.8
After-school program	After-school program or extended learning time for subset of school's students	PM	0: Not offered 1: Offered	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	96.9
After-school program recruitment	Consistent recruitment by City Year corps members of students not on track to graduate to attend after-school program	PM	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	78.1

(continued)

124

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Pillar III. Tiered Student Supports: Student Supports						
After-school program attendance rate	Percentage of students who regularly attend after-school program	PM	0: 0% 1: Less than 25% 2: Greater than 25%	2 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	56.3
City Year after-school program duration	Duration of City Year after-school program	PM	0: No program 1: present ¼ of year 2: Present ½ of year 3: Present ¾ of year 4: Present all year	4 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	46.9
Existing after-school program integration	Integration of City Year corps members into existing after-school program	PM	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	40.6
Existing after-school program duration	Duration of existing after-school program where City Year corps members are integrated	PM	0: No program 1: present ¼ of year 2: Present ½ of year 3: Present ¾ of year 4: Present all year	4 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	43.8
Whole-school activities	Number of whole-school activities (for example, health fairs or career days) during the year	PM	0: 0 activities 1: 1 activity 2: 2 activities 3: 3 activities 4: 4 activities 5: 5 activities 6: 6 activities 7: 7 activities 8: 8+ activities	4 = Adequate 8 = high fidelity	Yes	100.0

(continued)

125

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Pillar III. Tiered Student Supports: Student Case Management						
Case management of Tier III students	Percentage of EWI system Tier III students case managed	CIS	0: 0-24% 1: 25-49% 2: 50-74% 3: 75-99% 4: 100%	If less than 100 Tier III students: 4 = Adequate/ high fidelity If greater than 100 Tier III students: 3 = Adequate 4 = High fidelity	Yes	71.9
Case management of Tier III students: individual student plan	Percentage of case-managed students with individual student plans	CIS	0: 0-24% 1: 25-49% 2: 50-74% 3: 75-99% 4: 100%	3 = Adequate 4 = High fidelity	Yes	90.6
Case management of Tier III students: attendance	Percentage of case-managed students identified with attendance issues who are provided with attendance interventions	CIS	0: 0-24% 1: 25-49% 2: 50-74% 3: 75-99% 4: 100%	3 = Adequate 4 = High fidelity	Yes	75.0
Case management of Tier III students: behavior	Percentage of case-managed students identified with behavior problems who are provided with behavior interventions	CIS	0: 0-24% 1: 25-49% 2: 50-74% 3: 75-99% 4: 100%	3 = Adequate 4 = High fidelity	Yes	90.6

(continued)

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Pillar III. Tiered Student Supports: Student Case Management						
Case management of Tier III Students: academic needs	Percentage of case-managed students identified with academic needs who are provided with academic assistance interventions	CIS	0: 0-24% 1: 25-49% 2: 50-74% 3: 75-99% 4: 100%	3 = Adequate 4 = High fidelity	Yes	65.6
Case management of Tier III students: basic needs	Percentage of case-managed students identified with basic needs (for example, for food, clothing, or shelter) who are provided with basic needs/resource interventions	CIS	0: 0-24% 1: 25-49% 2: 50-74% 3: 75-99% 4: 100%	3 = Adequate 4 = High fidelity	No	87.5
Percentage of students case managed	Percentage of overall student population case managed	CIS	If school population is 1,000 or greater: 0: None 1: 1-4% 2: 5-10% 3: 11-15% If school population is less than 1,000: 0: None 1: 1-9% 2: 10-15% 3: 16-20%	2 = Adequate 3+ = High fidelity	No	65.6
Whole-school services: enrichment/motivation	Enrichment/motivation services	CIS	0: Not provided 1: Provided	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	96.9
Whole-school services: family engagement	Family engagement/strengthening services	CIS	0: Not provided 1: Provided	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	84.4

(continued)

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Pillar III. Tiered Student Supports: Student Case Management						
Whole-school services: life skills	Life skills/social development services	CIS	0: Not provided 1: Provided	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	75.0
Whole-school services: college/career	College/career services	CIS	0: Not provided 1: Provided	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	68.8
Whole-school services: physical health	Professional physical health services	CIS	0: Not provided 1: Provided	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	46.9
Whole-school services: community service	Community service opportunities	CIS	0: Not provided 1: Provided	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	37.5
Whole-school services: mental health	Professional mental health services	CIS	0: Not provided 1: Provided	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	37.5
Pillar IV. Can-Do Culture and Climate: Integrated On-Site Support						
Mathematics instructional facilitator	Technical assistance from the mathematics instructional facilitator	STF	0: Not provided to school 1: Provided	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	100.0
English/language arts instructional facilitator	Technical assistance from the English/language arts instructional facilitator	STF	0: Not provided to school 1: Provided	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	100.0
School and student support services (S4) facilitator	Technical assistance from S4 facilitator	STF	0: Not provided to school 1: Provided	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	100.0

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Pillar IV. Can-Do Culture and Climate: Integrated On-Site Support						
School transformation facilitator start date	Date school transformation facilitator began serving the school	STF	0: After the first progress report 1: After the first day of school, but before the first progress report 2: After Summer Institute, but before the first day of school 3: Before Summer Institute	2 = Adequate 3 = High fidelity	No	81.2
Mathematics instructional coach	Amount of time mathematics coach worked at school	STF	0: No mathematics coach in place 1: Less than half time at school 2: At least half time at school 3: Full time at school	2 = Adequate 3 = High fidelity	Yes	75.0
English/language arts instructional coach	Amount of time English/language arts coach worked at school	STF	0: No English/language arts coach in place 1: Less than half time at school 2: At least half time at school 3: Full time at school	2 = Adequate 3 = High fidelity	Yes	81.3
Site coordinator	Site coordinator at the school	CIS	0: Not in place 1: In place	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	100.0

(continued)

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Pillar IV. Can-Do Culture and Climate: Integrated On-Site Support						
Site coordinator start date	Date site coordinator began serving school	CIS	0: After the first progress report 1: After the first day of school, but before the first progress report 2: After Summer Institute, but before the first day of school 3: Before Summer Institute	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	81.3
City Year corps members retention	Percentage of City Year corps members retained	CY	0: 0-24% 1: 25-49% 2: 50-74% 3: 75%-89% 4: 90% or more	3 = Adequate 4 = High fidelity	Yes	100.0
City Year corps members: ratio to students	Ratio of City Year corps members to students	PM	0: No City Year corps members 1: 1:50 or higher 2: 1:30-49 3: 1:20-29	2 = Adequate 3 = High fidelity	Yes	78.1
City Year corps members: ratio of second-year to first-year	Ratio of second-year City Year corps members to first-year City Year corps members	PM	0: Greater than 1:10 1: 1:10 2: Less than 1:10	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	No	78.1

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130

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Pillar IV. Can-Do Culture and Climate: Family and Community Involvement						
Workshops for parents	Frequency of workshops offered to parents	STF	0: Never 1: Once 2: 2-3 times per year 3: Quarterly	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	No	87.5
Information for parents	Frequency with which teachers sent information to parents on how to help their children	STF	0: Never 1: Once 2: 2-3 times per year 3: Quarterly	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	No	78.1
Parent-teacher conferences	Parent-teacher conferences (with all core teachers) scheduled for each student's family	STF	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	75.0
Action team for partnerships	Action team for partnerships, or its equivalent, to develop, implement, and evaluate work on family and community engagement	STF	0: No 1: Yes, but the team did not receive training 2: Yes and the team did receive training	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	No	56.3
Parent volunteers	Parents formally recruited and trained to work as school volunteers	STF	0: No 1: Yes	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	No	18.8
Parent engagement practices	How well actual parent engagement practices matched ideal practices	STF	0: Weakly 1: Somewhat 2: Well 3: Very well	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	65.6

(continued)

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Program Staff Training and Development						
Partner responsiveness: Community In Schools to Talent Development	Talent Development staff's access to Communities In Schools' staff on a timely basis as needed	STF	0: None 1: A little 2: Some 3: Quite a bit	1 = Adequate 3 = High fidelity	Yes	100.0
Partner responsiveness: City Year to Talent Development	Talent Development staff's access to City Year's staff on a timely basis as needed	STF	0: None 1: A little 2: Some 3: Quite a bit	1 = Adequate 3 = High fidelity	Yes	100.0
Partner responsiveness: Talent Development to Communities In Schools	Communities In Schools staff's access to Talent Development's staff on a timely basis as needed	SC	0: None 1: A little 2: Some 3: Quite a bit	1 = Adequate 3 = High fidelity	Yes	100.0
Partner responsiveness: City Year to Communities In Schools	Communities In Schools staff's access to City Year's staff on a timely basis as needed	SC	0: None 1: A little 2: Some 3: Quite a bit	1 = Adequate 3 = High fidelity	Yes	100.0
Partner responsiveness: Communities In Schools to City Year	City Year corps members' access to Communities In Schools' staff on a timely basis as needed	PM	0: None 1: A little 2: Some 3: Quite a bit	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	93.8
Partner responsiveness: Talent Development to City Year	City Year corps members' access to Talent Development's staff on a timely basis as needed	PM	0: None 1: A little 2: Some 3: Quite a bit	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	93.8

132

(continued)

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Program Staff Training and Development						
Talent Development in-service training	Professional development plan for on-site training for teachers and school-based staff members focused on curriculum, school climate, and teaming	DNIST	0: Missing or not followed 1: Partially implemented 2: Fully implemented	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	81.3
Diplomas Now in-service training	Professional development plan for school-based team to engage in continuing professional development opportunities throughout the school year	DNIST	0: Missing or not followed 1: Partially implemented 2: Fully implemented	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	78.1
Diplomas Now Summer Institute	Three-day summer training session for school-based team aimed at helping a new Diplomas Now school start strong	DNIST	0: Not attended and no alternate training provided 1: Not attended, but partial alternate training provided 2: Attended or received full-fledged alternate training	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	78.1
Kickoff planning sessions	Joint planning sessions for school administrators and teachers prior to the start of the school year	DNIST	0: No 1: Yes 2: Yes, in April/May	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	59.4
City Year corps member training: teacher professional development	City Year corps members' participation in relevant teacher professional development opportunities	PM	0: Never 1: Sometimes (once or twice) 2: Consistently	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	93.8

(continued)

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Program Staff Training and Development						
School transformation facilitator summer training session	Five-day summer training session for school transformation facilitators	DNIST	0: Not attended and no alternate training provided 1: Not attended, but alternate training provided 2: Attended	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	Yes	96.9
Mathematics Coaches Institute	Three-day summer training session for math coaches	STF	0: Not attended and no alternate training provided 1: Not attended, but alternate training provided 2: Attended	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	No	43.8
English/language arts Coaches Institute	Three-day summer training session for English/language arts coaches	STF	0: Not attended and no alternate training provided 1: Not attended, but alternate training provided 2: Attended	1 = Adequate 2 = High fidelity	No	46.9
Site coordinator certification program	11-module online course, approximately 1.5-2 hours per module, for site coordinators	CIS	0: Did not complete 1: Completed 4 courses 2: Completed 8 courses 3: Completed all courses 4: Completed certification prior to the start of the school year	3 = Adequate 4 = High fidelity	Yes	40.6
City Year corps members training: use of data	Training for City Year corps members in the use of data to identify interventions	PM	0: Not received 1: Received	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	56.3

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134

Component	Operational Definition	Source[a]	Fidelity Scale	Criterion	Critical Component	Percentage of Schools Adequate
Program Staff Training and Development						
City Year corps members continuing coaching and support	Continuing support for City Year corps members in the use of data to identify interventions	PM	0: Not received 1: Received	1 = Adequate/ high fidelity	Yes	53.1
City Year corps member training: EWI	EWI-related training sessions for City Year corps members throughout the year	PM	0: Never 1: Once 2: Once a month 3: Twice a month 4: Three times a month 5: Four times a month or more	4 = Adequate 5 = High fidelity	No	34.4

NOTES: Average percentages of sites adequate for middle and high school-specific components reflect only the appropriate number of middle (17) or high (15) schools.

[a]Source surveys were abbreviated as follows: DNIST = the Diplomas Now Implementation Support Team survey; STF = Talent Development school transformation facilitator survey; PM = City Year program manager survey; SC = Communities In Schools site coordinator survey; CY = City Year records; CIS = Communities In Schools records.

Appendix C

Interview and Focus-Group Response Rates and Case-Study Methodology

This appendix includes supplementary information on the qualitative data (from interviews and focus groups) collected from case-study sites and discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. The first section consists of Table C.1, which shows the numbers of participants in the interviews and focus groups. The second section describes the methodology of the qualitative research. The final section consists of Table C.2, which adds more detail to Table 3.6, showing the frequencies of various types of responses by respondent type (Diplomas Now staff, school/district staff, or parent/student) and school type (middle or high school).

Interview and Focus-Group Response Counts

Diplomas Now

Table C.1

Numbers of Interview and Focus-Group Participants from Case-Study Sites

	All DN Schools		DN Middle Schools		DN High Schools	
	Total Participants	Total Schools	Total Participants	Total Schools	Total Participants	Total Schools
Respondent type						
Diplomas Now staff members	68	7	36	3	32	4
District/school staff members	50	6	24	3	25	3
Parents	14	4	7	2	7	2
Students	41	4	21	2	20	2
Sample size	173	7	88	3	84	4

SOURCES: Diplomas Now program staff, school, and district interviews and focus groups, spring 2012 and 2013.

NOTES: Data were collected at seven DN schools representing four districts (three schools and 15 participants in spring 2012 and four schools and 158 participants in spring 2013). The total number of district/school staff participants is higher than the sum of the middle and high school participants because one interview was conducted with a district-level staff member who oversaw both DN middle schools and DN high schools, and who was not included in either separate count.

Case-Study Methodology

To ensure the consistent use of best practices, the research team used standardized processes and detailed audit trails to collect and analyze case-study data. The following sections provide detail regarding protocol development, on-site data-collection activities, and qualitative analysis procedures.

Protocol Development

The research team paid careful attention to the development of protocols for semistructured interviews and focus groups intended to yield in-depth information about participants' experiences during the first year of implementation.[1] Protocol development was driven by the program logic model and the following five research questions:

1. How was the Diplomas Now model implemented in the case-study schools?

2. What factors facilitated implementation of the model and what factors hindered it?

3. What are the perceived benefits of the Diplomas Now model in the case-study schools?

4. What were the drawbacks to implementing the Diplomas Now model?

5. What lessons can be learned from the implementation of the Diplomas Now model in the case-study schools?

Interview and focus-group protocols contained similar sets of open-ended questions tailored to each participant group (enabling role-specific items) and focused on topics including implementation, collaborative activities, perceived impact, sustainability, and lessons for the future.

Data Collection

To capture participants' experiences during the first year of implementation, case-study data-collection activities were conducted at three schools in spring 2012 and four schools in spring 2013. Participating schools represented four districts across the United States. Two to three research team members visited each school for three to five days to conduct interviews, facilitate focus groups, and observe program activities. Individual interviews — approximately 60 minutes in length — were conducted with school-based staff members (for example, school transformation facilitators, City Year program managers and team leaders, Communities In Schools site coordinators, school administrators, school counselors, and instructional coaches) and district-based staff members (for example, instructional facilitators, Diplomas Now field managers, Diplomas Now Implementation Support Team representatives, school and student support services facilitators, and school district leaders). Focus groups with parents, students, teachers, and City Year corps members lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and ranged from 2 to 11 participants per group (see Table C.2 for the qualitative data collection matrix). Interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded; research team members also took notes. During their

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[1]Merriam (1998).

visits research team members also observed after-school programs, tutoring sessions, Early Warning Indicator meetings, and other Diplomas Now program activities; these observations ranged from 17 to 61 minutes in length. Following each site visit, the research team completed site-visit summaries to capture their overall impressions and main takeaways from the visit. All interview and focus-group recordings were transcribed verbatim.

Coding Processes and Procedures

Transcripts were stored, managed, and analyzed using the qualitative data analysis program Atlas.ti. This software was selected based on the research team's previous experience using it and because it can help researchers easily draw insights from different participant groups and data sources. Transcripts were segmented into "quotations," or units of data that were relevant and could stand alone.[2] Not all sections of transcripts were assigned codes, and some quotations received multiple or overlapping codes. Consistent with best practice, the research team looked for disconfirming evidence (or negative cases), rather than solely focusing on exemplary success stories, by using codes such as "nonexistent activity" and "absent element."

The inductive process of coding the interview and focus-group data was iterative and continuously driven both by the research purpose and by the data, a recommended analysis practice.[3] The research team developed an initial set of codes following a review of the program logic model and other program materials. Codes and their corresponding definitions were documented in a code book and the research team reviewed the code book collectively to facilitate shared understanding prior to coding.

The research team conducted two phases of coding. (See Box C.1 for the coding framework.) The first phase included an initial content analysis, whereby codes, established a priori, were applied to data.[4] Each transcript was independently analyzed by two research team members. To ensure inter-rater reliability, the team resolved any discrepant analyses during weekly consensus-building meetings. These regular meetings for peer debriefing also served as an opportunity to confirm that processes were being applied consistently, provide feedback on trends in coding (for example, on the over- or underemphasis of particular codes), clarify or revise the operational definitions of codes, organize codes into logical groups, and determine the need for additional codes. Coding decisions were discussed and analyzed until the team members reached agreement and clarified inconsistencies. In the second phase of coding, research

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[2]Lincoln and Guba (1985).
[3]Merriam (2009).
[4]Miles and Huberman (1994); Saldaña (2009); Patton (2002).

Box C.1

Coding Framework for Interviews and Focus Groups

Activity type. Program inputs and activities specific to Diplomas Now.

Background information. Introductory and background information on interview/focus-group participants.

Implementation challenges. Activities/practices identified as challenging to implement or barriers that reportedly made implementation a challenge.

Implementation facilitators. Activities/practices identified as effectively implemented or factors that reportedly made implementation successful.

Collaboration. Types of interactions to establish and capitalize on relationships (for example, formal meetings, informal communication, or planning) among key players such as Diplomas Now school-based staff members, administrators, and teachers.

Perceived program impact. Effects that participants attributed to Diplomas Now program-specific activities/inputs and details about whom or what was affected (for example, student behavior, student attendance, student course performance, or school climate).

Lessons learned. Things respondents would do differently or recommendations from the first year of implementation (for example, lessons, quotes, examples, or stories).

School context. Information about the setting in which Diplomas Now is implemented (for example, regarding resources, school characteristics, or staff stability).

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team members conducted ad hoc analysis to identify additional themes not previously identified using a priori codes. This final review was conducted to ensure the application of ad hoc codes to all transcripts.

Data Analysis Processes and Procedures

After completing two phases of coding, the team analyzed the frequency by which each code was applied to transcripts, or its "groundedness," to determine which codes should be aggregated, disaggregated, or deleted. In other words, codes with no or few quotations (low groundedness) were merged with other codes and codes with high groundedness were further analyzed to consider whether they needed to be broken apart into more specific codes. This process looked

for correspondences among codes, and helped achieve a manageable number of codes based on frequency, uniqueness, and importance.[5]

Diplomas Now activities described during interviews and focus groups were re-classified according to the inputs used in the program logic model (for example, after-school programs organized by City Year were reclassified as "Student Support Services"). Another step in the analysis was to aggregate collaboration codes to examine the various interactions occurring over the course of Diplomas Now implementation. Co-occurrence tables were used to compare the frequency with which each input and collaborative interaction was coded as an implementation facilitator, implementation challenge, lesson learned, or perceived program impact. Narrative summaries were used as a data-reduction technique and included an additional process to group quotations for further inquiry based on commonly co-occurring themes.[6] This allowed the research team to fully understand emerging themes based on the data, and to pull direct quotations or vignettes to illustrate relevant concepts.

Detailed Findings from the Qualitative Research

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[5]Creswell (1998); Merriam (1998).
[6]Seidman (2006); Maxwell (1995).

Diplomas Now

Table C.2

**First-Year Interview and Focus-Group Findings,
Numbers of Sessions in Which Diplomas Now Program Inputs Were Discussed,
by Implementation Themes, Respondent Type, and School Type**

	Respondent Type			School Type	
Implementation Themes	Number of Diplomas Now Staff Sessions	Number of School/District Staff Sessions	Number of Parent/Student Sessions	Number of Middle Sessions	Number of High School Sessions
Pillar I. Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities					
Strong Learning Environments[a]					
Identified as effectively implemented	5	5	1	0	11
Identified as challenging to implement	3	2	0	0	4
Perceived positive impact on school or students	0	2	1	0	3
Lessons learned for future implementation	4	1	0	1	4
Pillar II. Curriculum and Instruction with Professional Development					
Curriculum for College Readiness					
Identified as effectively implemented	2	5	1	0	8
Identified as challenging to implement	8	5	0	8	5
Perceived positive impact on school or students	0	2	0	0	2
Lessons learned for future implementation	3	6	0	4	5
Professional Development and Peer Coaching[a,b]					
Identified as effectively implemented	8	3	0	8	3
Identified as challenging to implement	13	6	0	10	8
Perceived positive impact on school or students	0	1	0	0	1
Lessons learned for future implementation	19	11	0	12	17

(continued)

Table C.2 (continued)

Implementation Themes	Respondent Type			School Type	
	Number of Diplomas Now Staff Sessions	Number of School/District Staff Sessions	Number of Parent/Student Sessions	Number of Middle Sessions	Number of High School Sessions
Pillar III. Tiered Student Supports					
Tiered Intervention Model[a]					
Identified as effectively implemented	14	11	0	7	18
Identified as challenging to implement	10	7	0	10	6
Perceived positive impact on school or students	2	5	0	1	6
Lessons learned for future implementation	9	6	0	4	11
Student Supports[a]					
Identified as effectively implemented	13	16	4	17	15
Identified as challenging to implement	11	10	0	13	7
Perceived positive impact on school or students	7	4	1	6	5
Lessons learned for future implementation	6	4	1	6	4
Student Case Management[a]					
Identified as effectively implemented	3	11	2	7	8
Identified as challenging to implement	2	2	1	1	3
Perceived positive impact on school or students	0	2	0	0	1
Lessons learned for future implementation	2	3	0	3	1
Pillar IV. Can-Do Culture and Climate					
Integrated On-Site Support[a]					
Identified as effectively implemented	11	9	0	10	10
Identified as challenging to implement	7	5	0	8	3
Perceived positive impact on school or students	3	1	0	2	1
Lessons learned for future implementation	5	5	0	5	4
Family and Community Involvement					
Identified as effectively implemented	7	4	1	5	7
Identified as challenging to implement	3	2	2	4	3
Perceived positive impact on school or students	6	2	1	6	3
Lessons learned for future implementation	1	2	2	2	3

(continued)

Table C.2 (continued)

SOURCES: Diplomas Now program staff, school, and district interviews and focus groups, spring 2012 and 2013.

NOTES: Data were collected at seven Diplomas Now schools representing four districts. Data-collection activities included 49 interviews and 28 focus groups with a total of 173 participants (25 participants per school, on average).

    This table reflects the number of interviews and focus groups in which each theme was discussed. Each interview and focus group was only counted once regardless of the number of times the theme was discussed during the interview or focus group session. The total number of district/school staff participants is higher than the sum of middle and high school participants as one interview was conducted with a district-level staff member who oversaw both DN middle schools and DN high schools, and who was not included in either separate count.

    Rows labeled "identified as effectively implemented" refer to instances in which interview/focus-group respondents reported that a Diplomas Now program input either was necessary to the success of the Diplomas Now model or was executed effectively. Rows labeled "identified as challenging to implement" refer to instances in which interview/focus-group respondents reported that a Diplomas Now program input was difficult to implement, did not work well, or was a barrier to the effective implementation of the Diplomas Now model. Rows labeled "perceived positive impact on school or students" refer to instances in which interview/focus-group respondents described changes in school climate, student attendance, student behavior/discipline, or student course performance that they attributed to the implementation of a particular program input. Rows labeled "lessons learned for future implementation" refer to instances in which interview/focus-group respondents talked about things they would have done differently, provided recommendations for other schools implementing the Diplomas Now model, described features unique to the first year of implementation, or described implications for sustaining Diplomas Now.

    [a]Indicates model inputs designated as critical to the Diplomas Now model.

    [b]While the inputs listed in the Diplomas Now logic model distinguish between "program staff professional development" and "professional development/peer coaching" for school staff members, the year-one case study analysis plan did not make this distinction and all types of training for both school and program staff members were assigned the same code. Future reports will make a distinction between training received by program staff members and training received by school staff members so that the analysis plan is parallel to inputs presented in the logic model.

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About MDRC

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through its research and the active communication of its findings, MDRC seeks to enhance the effectiveness of social and education policies and programs.

Founded in 1974 and located in New York City and Oakland, California, MDRC is best known for mounting rigorous, large-scale, real-world tests of new and existing policies and programs. Its projects are a mix of demonstrations (field tests of promising new program approaches) and evaluations of ongoing government and community initiatives. MDRC's staff bring an unusual combination of research and organizational experience to their work, providing expertise on the latest in qualitative and quantitative methods and on program design, development, implementation, and management. MDRC seeks to learn not just whether a program is effective but also how and why the program's effects occur. In addition, it tries to place each project's findings in the broader context of related research — in order to build knowledge about what works across the social and education policy fields. MDRC's findings, lessons, and best practices are proactively shared with a broad audience in the policy and practitioner community as well as with the general public and the media.

Over the years, MDRC has brought its unique approach to an ever-growing range of policy areas and target populations. Once known primarily for evaluations of state welfare-to-work programs, today MDRC is also studying public school reforms, employment programs for ex-offenders and people with disabilities, and programs to help low-income students succeed in college. MDRC's projects are organized into five areas:

- Promoting Family Well-Being and Children's Development
- Improving Public Education
- Raising Academic Achievement and Persistence in College
- Supporting Low-Wage Workers and Communities
- Overcoming Barriers to Employment

Working in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada and the United Kingdom, MDRC conducts its projects in partnership with national, state, and local governments, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.