

## Diplomas Now: A Ground-Breaking Approach to Supporting High-Need Schools

### Overview

Founded in 2008, Diplomas Now is an innovative school turnaround collaboration between Talent Development Secondary, City Year and Communities In Schools, leveraging over 80 years of combined experience working in and with low-performing, under-resourced schools. In August 2010, the U.S. Department of Education awarded Diplomas Now a prestigious Investing in Innovation (i3) grant to validate the model's early promising results. Diplomas Now, the only national secondary school transformation model to receive an i3 grant, is partnering with MDRC, a leading research organization, to study the impact of the model on school attendance, behavior, course performance, and graduation rates in some of the nation's highest-need schools. This study is the largest randomized control trial of secondary school reform in the country and will evaluate the effectiveness of Diplomas Now compared to other reforms.

### Diplomas Now Collaboration

The Diplomas Now model was developed in response to research findings identifying the early warning indicators of eventual high school dropouts. This unique partnership model unites three organizations – Johns Hopkins Talent Development Secondary, City Year, and Communities In Schools (CIS) - which all have proven track records of improving school success and student achievement, to create an innovative secondary school partnership focused on meeting the holistic needs of all students in grades 6 through 12.

- Talent Development Secondary provides comprehensive, on-site support focused on building a strong and safe school environment, creating and refining effective professional learning communities, and ensuring effective teaching and learning in every classroom. Talent Development also helps create and manage an Early Warning Indicator data tool and multi-tiered student support process.
- City Year places diverse teams of 8 to 20 talented, young adults in Diplomas Now partner schools to provide school-wide and targeted supports, which include attendance and behavior monitoring and coaching, tutoring, mentoring, homework support, and extended day activities.
- CIS provides an on-site coordinator to provide school-wide prevention and climate support as well as case-management and high intensity supports for the most challenged students in order to address the underlying issues hindering their success.

### A Partnership with Secondary Public Schools

The Diplomas Now model consists of an early warning system that alerts teachers as soon as students begin to demonstrate off-track behavior, an additional team of adults to provide targeted and intensive supports, and a whole school reform strategy that includes instructional programs that are linked to college readiness standards, extensive professional development for administrators and teachers, and comprehensive programs for family and community involvement, among others.



The Diplomas Now model is organized around the four pillars of school reform, designed to provide schools with the organizational structure and resources that they need to achieve. These pillars are supported by the full-time, school-based Diplomas Now team, comprised of the Talent Development school transformation facilitator, team of City Year corps members, City Year program manager, and Communities In Schools site coordinator, and are enhanced through monthly implementation review meetings between district leadership and the Diplomas Now local executive team.

Diplomas Now partners with schools to implement the following required elements in addition to additional support based on individual school needs assessments:

*Pillar I: Teacher Teams and Small Learning Communities*

- Staffing model that supports interdisciplinary teacher teams with common, collaborative planning time during the professional day (both in interdisciplinary team and vertical subject-area professional learning communities)
- 4x4 block schedule in high schools (Four extended learning periods or four periods and one enrichment, elective period)
- Small learning communities with dedicated administrators and counselors
  - 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Academy
  - 2 or more thematic academies for grades 10-12
- Shared cohort of manageable number of students (75-90) in which each City Year corps member follows one cohort through ELA and math courses and has a focus list of students within that cohort
- At least bi-weekly Early Warning Indicator Meetings attended by teacher teams, Diplomas Now partners and other student support staff
- Access to real-time early warning indicator data and appropriate student information systems
- Diplomas Now partners' participation on school leadership team, sign off on school schedule

*Pillar II: Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development*

- College preparatory evidence-based core academic curricula in math, language arts, science, and social studies
- Evidence-based accelerated learning extra-help classes in math and English for all students who need them
- Implementation of Mastering Middle Grades or Freshman Seminar, a foundational school success courses
- Integration of Diplomas Now professional development priorities into school's professional development plan and calendar
- Full-time, school-based Math and ELA instructional coaches
- Professional learning community

*Pillar III: Tiered Student Supports*

- School wide attendance and positive behavior programs
- Extended learning time and after-school programs
- Programs to strengthen parent and community involvement



- Coordination of all partners working within the school
- Case management for the highest need students

*Pillar IV: Can-Do Culture and Climate*

- Supportive school environment with high expectations for students and clear pathways to success
- School-wide climate and culture building programs
- Highly engaging and relevant learning experiences for all students
- Formal vehicles for student and teacher voice
- School-wide college-going culture
- Initiatives to recognize student progress and teacher accomplishments

**Promising Results**

During the 2016-2017 school year, the following promising results were seen for students that were identified as off-track at any point during the year:

- 65% reduction in the number of suspended students<sup>1</sup>
- 58% reduction in the number of students failing English<sup>2</sup>
- 47% reduction in the number of students failing math<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, through strong prevention work DN was able to provide more than 90% of all students that began the year with no early warning indicators the supports that they needed to stay on track for the remainder of the year, ensuring that those students had a successful year from the first day to the last.

---

<sup>1</sup> n=881

<sup>2</sup> n=1,255

<sup>3</sup> n=1,564

