

What Works Clearinghouse



Talent Development High Schools

Program description *Talent Development High Schools* is a school reform model for restructuring large high schools with persistent attendance and discipline problems, poor student achievement, and high drop-out rates. The model includes both structural and curriculum reforms. It calls for schools to reorganize into small “learning

communities”—including ninth-grade academies for first-year students and career academies for students in upper grades—to reduce student isolation and anonymity. It also emphasizes high academic standards and provides all students with a college-preparatory academic sequence.

Research One study of *Talent Development High Schools* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards with reservations. The quasi-experimental research design included multiple cohorts of entering ninth-grade students from 11 Philadelphia high schools—five *Talent Development High Schools* and six

matched comparison schools.¹ The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *Talent Development High Schools* to be small for progressing in school. No studies that met the WWC evidence standards with or without reservations addressed staying in school or completing school.

Effectiveness *Talent Development High Schools* was found to have potentially positive effects on progressing in school.

	<i>Staying in school</i>	<i>Progressing in school</i>	<i>Completing school</i>
Rating of effectiveness	na	Potentially positive effects	na
Improvement index²	na	Average: +7 percentile points Range: +6 to +8 percentile points	na

na = not applicable

1. The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.
 2. These numbers show the average improvement index for all findings across the study.

Additional program information

Developer and contact

Talent Development High Schools was developed by The Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR), housed at Johns Hopkins University's Center for the Social Organization of Schools (CSOS). Information on the model's history and current resources for program implementation are available from CSOS at www.csos.jhu.edu/tdhs.

Scope of use

Talent Development High Schools was initiated in 1994 through a partnership between CRESPAR and Patterson High School in Baltimore, Maryland. CSOS reports that, as of March 2007, 43 districts in 15 states were operating schools using the *Talent Development High Schools* model in full or in part.

Description of intervention

Talent Development High Schools is a school reform model for restructuring large high schools facing serious problems with attendance, discipline, student achievement, and dropping out. To address these problems and to prepare all students for post-secondary education and employment, the model introduces both structural and curriculum reforms. To reduce student anonymity and isolation, *Talent Development High Schools* reorganizes high schools into smaller learning communities, including a ninth-grade academy, career academies for the upper grades, and an after-hours school for students with serious discipline problems. The ninth-grade academy is a self-contained school-within-a-school for first-year students, taught by a team of four to five teachers. Career academies for the upper grades, self-contained groups of about 300 students organized around career themes, have their own teaching staff and management. The "Twilight School," an after-hours program for students with serious attendance or discipline problems, provides small classes and extensive support services.

Curriculum reforms, complementing the structural changes, address low student expectations and poor academic preparation, which the model views as root causes of dropping out. To increase expectations for student achievement, *Talent Development High Schools* provides a college-preparatory academic sequence for all students. The program provides "double dose" mathematics and English courses for ninth and tenth graders. The first semester of "double dose" courses is remedial English or math; the second semester is the district-mandated course, a full-credit (and typically year-long) course covered in one semester of daily 90-minute sessions. In addition, as part of the ninth-grade academy, all first-year students complete a one-semester seminar that teaches strategies for meeting the increased academic demands of high school.

To address the challenges of implementing large-scale school reform, *Talent Development High Schools* emphasizes ongoing technical assistance and professional development for staff. Each school is assigned a team of curriculum coaches trained by CSOS to work with school staff to implement the model. In addition, CSOS sponsors annual conferences for *Talent Development High Schools* staff.

Cost

According to the CSOS, the additional cost of operating *Talent Development High Schools* (above and beyond the cost of continuing to operate their traditional high school model) is about \$350 per student per year. This estimate includes the costs of curriculum materials and ongoing technical assistance. CSOS indicates that school districts may have additional expenses if the shift to block scheduling and the implementation of the academy model requires them to hire additional staff. In some cases, school districts may also incur additional costs if they need to renovate their facilities so that the ninth-grade academy and the career academies can be housed in distinct parts of the building.

Research The WWC reviewed four studies of the effectiveness of *Talent Development High Schools*. One study (Kemple, Herlihy, & Smith, 2005) used a quasi-experimental research design and met WWC evidence standards with reservations. The other three studies did not meet WWC evidence screens.

Met evidence standards with reservations

The Kemple, Herlihy, & Smith (2005) study of *Talent Development High Schools* used a quasi-experimental research design known as comparative interrupted time series analysis. The study focused on five Philadelphia high schools that began implementing *Talent Development High Schools* between 1999 and 2001. These schools were matched to six similar Philadelphia high schools that did not implement the program. The study compared the outcomes of ninth graders who entered *Talent Development High Schools* in the years immediately after the program was implemented with the outcomes of ninth graders

from these schools in the years just before program implementation and the outcomes in the comparison schools. The difference between outcomes before and after implementation in *Talent Development High Schools* and the comparison schools is the estimate of the program's effects.

Extent of evidence

The WWC categorizes the extent of evidence in each domain as small or moderate to large (see the [What Works Clearinghouse Extent of Evidence Categorization Scheme](#)). The extent of evidence takes into account the number of studies and total sample size across the studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations.³

The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *Talent Development High Schools* to be small for progressing in school. No studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations addressed staying in school or completing school.

Effectiveness Findings

The WWC review of interventions for dropout prevention addresses student outcomes in three domains: staying in school, progressing in school, and completing school. For Kemple, Herlihy, & Smith (2005), WWC assessed outcomes only in the progressing in school domain.⁴

Progressing in school. Kemple, Herlihy, & Smith (2005) found that students using *Talent Development High Schools* earned an average of 9.5 course credits over the first two years of high school, while comparison group students earned 8.6 course

credits. In addition, *Talent Development High Schools* students were more likely to be promoted to tenth grade than comparison students (68% vs. 60%).⁵ Both differences were statistically significant.

Rating of effectiveness

The WWC rates the effects of an intervention in a given outcome domain as positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness takes into account four factors: the quality of the research

3. The Extent of Evidence Categorization was developed to tell readers how much evidence was used to determine the intervention rating, focusing on the number and size of studies. Additional factors associated with a related concept, external validity, such as students' demographics and types of settings in which studies took place, are not taken into account for the categorization.
4. The study also examined outcomes in the staying in school and completing school domains. However, these analyses did not meet WWC standards. Please see Appendix A1 for details.
5. These comparison group means were not directly reported by Kemple, Herlihy, & Smith (2005) and were obtained by a simple transformation of the results provided in the report. See the [WWC Talent Development High Schools Technical Appendices](#) for more details.

Effectiveness *(continued)*

The WWC found *Talent Development High Schools* to have potentially positive effects on progressing in school

design, the statistical significance of the findings,⁶ the size of the difference between participants in the intervention and the com-

parison conditions, and the consistency in findings across studies (see the [WWC Intervention Rating Scheme](#)).

Improvement index

The WWC computes an improvement index for each individual finding. In addition, within each outcome domain, the WWC computes an average improvement index for each study and an average improvement index across studies (see [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#)). The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition versus the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison condition. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, the improvement index is based entirely on the size of the effect, regardless of the statistical significance of the effect, the study design, or the analyses. The improvement index can take on values between -50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting results favorable to the intervention group.

The average improvement index for progressing in school is +7 percentile points based on the one study that passed WWC evidence screens, with a range of +6 to +8 percentile points across the findings.

Summary

The WWC reviewed four studies on *Talent Development High Schools*. One study met WWC standards with reservations; the remaining studies did not meet WWC evidence screens. Based on this one study, the WWC found potentially positive effects on progressing in school. The conclusions presented in this report may change as new research emerges.

References

Met WWC evidence standards with reservations

Kemple, J., Herlihy, C., & Smith, T. (2005). *Making progress toward graduation: Evidence from the Talent Development High School model*. New York: MDRC.

Additional source:

Kemple, J., & Herlihy, C. (2004). *The Talent Development High School model: Context, components, and initial impacts on ninth-grade students' engagement and performance*. New York: MDRC.

Did not meet WWC evidence screens

Balfanz, R., Legters, N., & Jordan, W. (2004). *Catching up: Impact of the Talent Development ninth grade instructional interventions in reading and mathematics in high-poverty high schools*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, CRESPAR.⁷

McPartland, J., Balfanz, R., Jordan, W., & Legters, N. (1998). Improving climate and achievement in a troubled urban high school through the Talent Development model. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 3(4), 337–361.⁸

6. The level of statistical significance was reported by the study authors or, where necessary, calculated by the WWC to correct for clustering within classrooms or schools and for multiple comparisons. For an explanation, see the [WWC Tutorial on Mismatch](#). See [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#) for the formulas the WWC used to calculate the statistical significance. In the case of Kemple, Herlihy, & Smith (2005), the study authors had corrected for clustering, so no additional corrections were required. The WWC did, however, correct the statistical significance levels for multiple comparisons.
7. The outcome measures are not relevant to this review.
8. Lack of evidence of baseline equivalence: the study, which used a quasi-experimental design, did not establish that the comparison group was equivalent to the intervention group at baseline.

References *(continued)*

McPartland, J., Legters, N., Jordan, W., & McDill, E. L. (1996). *The Talent Development High School: Early evidence of impact on school climate, attendance, and student development* (Report No. 2). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, CRESPAR.⁹

For more information about specific studies and WWC calculations, please see the [WWC Talent Development High Schools Technical Appendices](#).

9. The study did not use a comparison group to assess relevant WWC outcomes.