The Impact of Personalized Guidance and Support on Reengagement Success

Academic Outcomes of Opportunity Works Students Enrolled at Opportunity Youth Academies (2016-2017)

PURPOSE

The purpose of this analysis is to compare the academic status and progress achieved by students at the Opportunity Youth Academy based on their engagement with Education Navigators provided by the Social Innovation Fund supported Opportunity Works program. The outcomes under analysis are enrollment status (i.e., active or inactive), credits earned, and high school graduation.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In March 2015, Kids in Common was one of seven communities to receive a federal Social Innovation Fund sub-award from Jobs for the Future to pilot the Opportunity Works (OW) program. This award allowed Kids in Common to bring the evidence-based Back on Track model of reengagement-through-postsecondary education to Santa Clara County. Jobs for the Future developed this three-phase model by studying best practices from high-performing reengagement education programs across the country.

Back on Track is built on the assumption that postsecondary education is now critical to young people's future employment prospects, and, ultimately, a key determinant of their ability to achieve self-sufficiency. The model provides a holistic educational framework that includes a robust secondary environment, careful attention to the postsecondary preparation and transition process, and continued support through the first year of postsecondary. Included in all phases of Back on Track is "personalized guidance and support." The phases of Back on Track are: Enriched Preparation, Postsecondary Bridging, and First Year Support.

Kids in Common implemented the Enriched Preparation phase of the model through a unique, collaborative strategy. Kids in Common created the concept of an Education Navigator. These positions were then contracted out to local community based organizations with expertise in serving specific system impacted subpopulations of Opportunity Youth. While housed and supported by community based organizations, Education Navigators were embedded in two high schools that specialize in providing reengagement education to young people who previously left school without a diploma.

The Education Navigator role/function was designed to provide the personalized guidance and support

element of the Enriched Preparation phase of the Back on Track model. In practice, the work of Education Navigators naturally bled into and through the Postsecondary Bridging phase as Education Navigators saw the chasm students faced in becoming ready to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Education Navigators provided a robust mix of personalized coaching, academic advocacy, case management, and postsecondary exploration and bridging built on the core features of Enriched Preparation's personalized guidance and support element. The necessary features of which are:

Enriched Preparation - Personalized Guidance and Support
• Students develop a clear, realistic, and detailed postsecondary and career plan.
• Students develop an understanding of how they learn best, reflecting regularly on what they still must accomplish or master to achieve college and career readiness.
• Program provides leadership, service and work opportunities to build students' agency, self-advocacy and key academic and career behaviors, such as persistence and time management.
• The program works to strengthen students' care network, such as child-care and mental health resources, so they have adequate support to address barriers that impede learning.
• Staff develop students' abilities to have greater responsibility and voice in their own learning and life choices.

The Education Navigator function/role was informed by several research-based ideas including dropout prevention strategies that focus on close and highly personalized coaching like Check & Connect and the Communities in Schools case management model, and the general evidence base supporting the efficacy of wrap around support in education environments. Foundational in developing the role were the Youth Development Institute's Primary Person Approach, and the Framework for Advancing the Well-Being and Self-Sufficiency of At-Risk Youth developed by Mathematica Policy Research on behalf of Administration for Children and Families. The design was further influenced by the work of Seattle Education Access and the work of the Philadelphia Youth Network's E3 Power Centers' coaching approach. Finally, it is worth noting, the entirety of the Education Navigator role is underpinned by the imperative to develop an authentic and deeply trusting relationship with each student, and a respect for every students' right to self-determination.

Education Navigators were embedded at reengagement high schools that specialize in serving youth and young adults who previously left school without a diploma. The OW program's target population was young adults (18-24-year-olds) who had experienced or were experiencing, at least one of the following: the justice system, foster system, homelessness, or pregnant/parenting. Our school partners identified students and referred to them to Education Navigators. Thus, the Education Navigators tended to receive the most system-impacted, high-need students (Figure 1) in Santa Clara County. More than 40% of the project's referrals were impacted by *at least two* of the above experiences. Upon referral to the Education

Navigators, students went through a lengthy initial period of rapport and trust building before formally "starting" the program. This entry period culminated in the Education Navigator and the student co-creating an Education Action Plan. Though each student received full support on day one, the idea was to steadily build engagement through a structured process that allowed them to develop a trusting relationship and consciously opt into the program.

Critical to the OW entry process was the School Success Meeting sequence. This was a staged four-meeting process. This meeting sequence was intended to accomplish three goals: a) build the student's capacity for self-advocacy, b) ensure clarity on and alignment between the school's expectations and student's requirements for graduation, and c) foster healthy connections between the student and school staff.

The School Success Meeting sequence started with a preparation meeting between the Education Navigator and student to explore the student's past experience with school and their current perceptions and assumptions about school. Additionally, the first meeting included a student-led discussion of what the meeting with school staff might be like and who should be present. Students were asked to imagine what it might feel like to present, and to hypothesize what school staff might have to say and how that might make them feel. Critically, at the conclusion of the preparation meeting, students were offered the choice to participate. Students were told the school meeting must happen to establish clarity on graduation requirements, but knowing education was a substantial source of trauma for students, it was their choice whether or not to participate. Next came a conversation between the Education Navigator and the school staff participating in the meeting in order to understand what staff wanted to discuss in terms of students requirements to graduate and/or and behavioral issues. This was important to ensure that school staff felt included in the meeting planning process and allowed the Education Navigator and student to prepare for any potential stressful or uncomfortable conversation. The third stage in this sequence was the actual meeting between school staff, student (if they chose to participate) and Education Navigator, which included a carefully structured set of questions, to ensure staff were clear in expressing expectations and graduation requirements, and students had the opportunity to share their educational goals, express concerns about school, and ask questions in a safe space. Finally, a debrief meeting occurred between the Education Navigator and the student to confirm a shared understanding of the meeting, and to process the resulting thoughts and feelings.

Over the first 3-8 weeks, depending on the initial engagement and responsivity of the student, the Education Navigators conducted the following activities in this sequence:

Opportunity Works Student Entry Process
1. Initial one-on-one conversation
2. Introductory questionnaire
3. Self-sufficiency questionnaire and matrix

After this initial period, once the Education Action Plan was set, the Education Navigators were expected to conduct weekly outreach to each student to ensure a proactive, rather than reactive posture. Believing that a strong relationship and consistent contact were the drivers of success, Education Navigators were expected to meet with students twice each month for substantive in-person coaching, and maintain weekly contact whether in-person or electronic. Of course, during times of difficulty or periods of surging momentum, more intensive contact was provided as needed. This support continued through graduation and beyond, as graduation was not the end goal. The Education Navigator was designed to support each student through postsecondary enrollment, and if possible through the first academic period of postsecondary education.

To support postsecondary readiness and transitions, Education Navigators began intensive postsecondary exploration and planning once a student had fewer than 60 credits to complete toward graduation. Once across this credit threshold, Education Navigators began artfully inserting more direct postsecondary conversations into coaching sessions, and quickly incorporated the Postsecondary Plan and the My Pathway tools.

The My Pathways tool is a holistic and youth-centered tool that supports exploration and goal setting. The Postsecondary Plan tool is a robust tool that serves as a process guide and document of record for the postsecondary exploration and enrollment process. Education Navigators used these tools together to steadily support students in the long process of college and career exploration and planning. The My Pathways tool supported self-reflection, exploration, and self-motivated pathway identification. While the Postsecondary Plan tool guided and captured the totality of the postsecondary journey, and served as singular place to capture things like FAFSA pins and web portal log-ins, as well college budget and schedule planning. At graduation, every student was expected to have a complete Postsecondary Plan, inclusive of a decision to attend and enrollment at the postsecondary institution of their choice.

Education Navigators were able to support students for up to 26 months. When all pieces fit together, students should have experience an increase in self-sufficiency conditions, completed a high school diploma, enrolled in postsecondary, and persisted through the first academic period.

METHODOLOGY

This analysis estimates whether OW students may have benefited academically from the program. It compares the outcomes of OW students enrolled at an OYA in 2016 and 2017 with a similar group of OYA students who did not participate in OW over the same period.

OW students enrolled in the OYA at different school terms in 2016 and 2017, and entered at different grade levels. Thus, there are differences in the number of credits students needed to graduate, as well as the amount of time available to earn credits and graduate. To make valid comparisons between groups, the analysis therefore must differentiate student outcomes based on grade and OYA entry point.

The OW sample includes all students who spent at least 10 weeks in the OW program during the 2016-17 school year and attended an Opportunity Youth Academy that year. The comparison groups were selected by identifying non-OW students who entered OYA at the same time, were at the same grade level, and had similar demographic characteristics. Demographic similarity was based on a logistic regression predicting OW membership. The regression model included the following predictors: gender, age, English Learner status, special needs status, and OW eligibility (foster youth, pregnant/parenting, justice-engaged, and homeless). The logistic regression analysis generated a score for each student predicting the likelihood of non-OW students being OW students.

For each group of OW students that had the same initial school term and grade level at the OYA, an equal number of non-OW students who started at the same time and grade level were then selected in order of their predicted OW membership scores until the comparison group had the same number of students as the OW sample.

SAMPLE

The sample includes the 28 OW youth that had any OYA course records since 2016. (Four other OW youth were part of the program but did not appear in the records provided by the OYA.)

The table below indicates the number of youth with course records in the OW and non-OW samples by OYA entry grade and term, and then compares the two samples by demographic characteristics. Eighteen out of 28 OW youth entered as 12th graders in fall 2016 or spring 2017. The other 10 students entered between fall 2016 and summer 2016, either as 10th, 11th or 12th graders.

Comparison of Non-OW and OW Samples

	Non-OW Comparison Sample Size	OW Sample Size
Entered OYA in:		
10th grade – Fall 2016	1	1
11th grade – Fall 2016	2	2
12th grade – Spring 2016	5	5
12th grade – Summer 2016	2	2
12th grade – Fall 2016	10	10
12th grade – Spring 2017	8	8
Demographics	Pct of Sample	Pct of Sample

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Foster youth	**71%**	**68%**
Pregnant/parenting	18%	54%
Justice engaged	29%	32%
Homeless	18%	25%
Special needs	7%	32%
English learner	21%	32%
Latino	68%	68%
Male	54%	36%
Age (average)	20.0	20.8

RESULTS

How many students stayed in school, left school, or graduated (through December 2017)?

The table below shows the number of students in the two samples as of February 2018 that are still active, have graduated, or have exited the OYA without graduating. Overall, three times as many OW students as comparison students have graduated as of February 2018 (differences are statistically significant, $p < .05$).

More than twice as many OW students as non-OW students in each sample are still active, while 18 comparison students have exited before graduation. Only one OW student has exited prior to graduation.

Enrollment and Graduation Status

OYA Entry Grade	OYA Enrollment Period	Non-OW Sample (n=28)			OW Sample (n=28)		
		Still Active	Grad.	Exited (not grad.)	Still Active	Grad.	Exited (not grad.)
10th grade	Fall 2016 – Fall 2017 (n=1)	1	0	0	1	0	0
11th grade	Fall 2016 – Fall 2017 (n=2)	1	0	1	1	0	1*
12th grade	Spring 2016 – Fall 2017 (n=5)	1	2	2	1	4	0
	Summer 2016 – Fall 2017 (n=2)	0	1	1	1	1	0
	Fall 2016 – Fall 2017 (n=10)	1	0	9	6	4	0
	Spring 2017 – Fall 2017 (n=8)	2	1	5	5	3	0
Total	All periods	6	4	18	15	12	1

Reason: "Group home failure."

Exit Reasons for Non-OW Students

Among the 18 non-OW students who exited without graduating, the reasons are:

- Non-Attendance – 12
- Moved away – 2
- Parent request – 2
- Violation of ASD Behavior Code – 1
- Completed Goals - 1

CREDIT ATTAINMENT

Credits Earned In 2016-2017

This analysis compares the number of credits students earned according to their OW participation. The first table below (Fig. 4) compares the total credits earned during the 2016-17 school year by OW and non-OW students. This is the period when OW students were receiving the most intensive services while enrolled at their OYA. On average, OW students earned 15 more credits (41.9 credits during the school year compared to 26.8) than students in the comparison group.

Credits Earned in 2016-17

	HS Credits Earned		
	Pre 2016-2017 Average	2016-2017 Average	*Total*
Non-OW Sample (n=28)	92.9	26.8	119.7
OW Sample (n=28)	108.3	41.9	150.2
Difference	15.4 *(Not Sig.)*	15.1*	30.5

*p<.10.

Cumulative Credits Earned

Next, Figure 5 (below) considers the entire course record of non-OW and OW students through the fall 2017 term. It does not include students in the two samples who had graduated as of December 2017.

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Students are disaggregated by OYA entry grade and start date to account for the fact that many started at different times and therefore had different periods over which to accumulate credits.

On average, OW students earned almost twice as many credits than the non-OW comparison group. The average difference in cumulative credits earned post-OYA entry is statistically significant, based on an analysis of variance model that controlled for differences in grade level, OYA entry term and the number of credits earned prior to entering the OYA.

Credits Earned Pre and Post OYA Entry Among Non-Graduated Students

OYA Entry Grade – OYA Entry Term	Non-OW Comparison Group		OW	
	Pre-OYA Credits	Post-OYA Credits	Pre-OYA Credits	Post-OYA Credits
10th grade – Fall 2016	17.5 (N=1)	48.0	39.5 (N=1)	52.5
11th grade – Fall 2016	12.7 (N=2)	18.3	57.3 (N=2)	47.0
12th grade – Spring 2016	48.3 (N=3)	71.9	26.0 (N=1)	68.5
12th grade – Summer 2016	35.5 (N=1)	4.0	45.0 (N=1)	139.0
12th grade – Fall 2016	100.7 (N=10)	37.2	72.5 (N=6)	80.9
12th grade – Spring 2017	115.2 (N=7)	16.6	117.6 (N=5)	30.0
Average (all grades & terms)	85.6 (N=24)	33.0*	78.0 (N=16)	61.8*

The difference between OW and Non-OW students in post-OYA credits is statistically significant (p<.05), based on an analysis of variance (ANOVA) model controlling for differences in pre-OYA credits, OYA entry grades, and starting terms.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the 28 students in the OW sample were more likely to graduate or remain active in school than were non-OW students who entered the OYA at the same time and had similar demographic characteristics. OW students also earned more credits, on average, than comparable students.

During the 2016-2017 school year when OW students were receiving direct services, OW students earned an average of 15 more credits (41.9 credits during the school year compared to 26.8) than students in the comparison group – a 55 percent difference. Over their entire OYA enrollment periods through the end of 2017, OW students that did not graduate earned almost twice as many credits on average (62 credits) than a comparable sample of non-OW students (33 credits). The difference in credits holds even after controlling for differences between the samples based on grade level at entry, amount of time at the OYA, and credits earned prior to OYA entry.

APPENDIX A: OPPORTUNITY WORKS SITES

Site	Implementing Organization and Partners	Back on Track phase
Boston, MA	Boston Private Industry Council	Postsecondary Bridging
Hartford, CT	Capital Workforce Partners	Postsecondary Bridging
New Orleans, LA	EMPLOY collaborative – collective impact backbone	Enriched Preparation
Philadelphia, PA	Philadelphia Youth Network	Postsecondary Bridging
San Francisco, CA	Bay Area Community Resources	Enriched Preparation
Santa Clara County, CA	Kids in Common	Enriched Preparation
Seattle/South King County, WA	Seattle Education Access	Postsecondary Bridging