Getting on-track: Lessons from Éxito's first year

RESEARCH for *ACTION*

An evaluation for Congreso de Latinos Unidos

Contents

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Introduction

Approximately 40% of Philadelphia students drop out of their district school at some point during their high school career. Of the students who choose not to complete their secondary education, 30% are in the ninth grade.[1] The impact of the high dropout rate on Philadelphia's neighborhoods is significant, and community agencies have a vested interest in working with schools to address this problem.

Congreso de Latinos Unidos is a non-profit organization that serves the neighborhoods of eastern North Philadelphia, a predominantly Latino community. Congreso aims to improve the quality of life for community members through various social, economic, education and health services. The organization recognizes that addressing the truancy and dropout rate at its neighborhood school, Thomas A. Edison High School, is critical in advancing its goals of increasing educational attainment and employment.

Congreso's Approach

In the eastern region of the city, 16-20% of high school students drop out annually, and at Edison only 39.8% were "on-track to graduation" in 2007-08.[2] In response this crisis, Congreso developed Éxito, a program designed to identify students who are at-risk of dropping out of Edison and to engage them in a holistic system of support. The intention is to reduce potential barriers to educational success during students' ninth grade year. The program design is based on an after-school model in which students are provided academic assistance and enrichment activities. It also includes client management services for a smaller group of students, which helps to resolve social and family impediments to engagement in school. Underlying these services is a partnership between Congreso and Edison High School as well as collaboration between two Congreso divisions. While Éxito was piloted with a small group of students in 2007-08, it was brought to scale for its first full year of implementation in 2008-09.

Little research exists on the efforts of community organizations to support students at-risk of dropping out of school. Given the importance of finding ways to reduce the dropout rate, it is critical to document the impact of Éxito as well as the accomplishments and challenges in developing a program that effectively serves students who are not on-track to graduation.

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[1] Neild, R. C. & Balfanz, R. (2006). *Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis, 2000-2005.* Philadelphia: Philadelphia Youth Network.
[2] Ibid. and 2008-2009 Annual Report provided by the School District of Philadelphia. Available at http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/

Purposes of the Year One Report

In this report, Research for Action (RFA) focuses on the first year of program implementation. The purposes of the report are three-fold:

- To introduce the cohort of Éxito participants that will be the focus of longitudinal research
- To begin to document Éxito's impact on program participants
- To provide formative information on program implementation, which can assist the development of the Éxito program

The evaluation asked the following questions about Éxito's student cohort and participant involvement in the program:

- Who were the youth that Éxito enrolled and served in the first year? Was Éxito able to enroll the number of youth they hoped to serve and how many of these youth were at risk of dropping out of high school?

- How frequently did youth participate in the Éxito program and did participation rates reach the threshold necessary for the program to impact student outcomes?

The evaluation asked the following questions about Éxito's impact in year one:

- Are youth in the Éxito program on-track to graduation after one year of involvement in the program? In particular, are youth who entered the program as off-track now on-track to graduate?

- Are Éxito participants more likely to be on-track to graduation than other Edison ninth graders who did not participate in Éxito?

The evaluation asked the following questions about program implementation:

- What strategies did Éxito use to enroll and retain students and which were most effective? What motivated or hindered students from participating in the Éxito program?

- How were the key components of the Éxito program (after-school tutoring and enrichment activities and client management) implemented? How were key pieces of the program infrastructure (interdepartmental collaborations and partnership with Edison High School) developed? What were the strengths of these and what challenges were encountered in the first year?

Research Methods

To answer these questions, RFA conducted 31 interviews with Éxito and school staff and students as well as 6 focus groups with current and former participants. We analyzed a satisfaction survey of Éxito

participants. Our data also included 13 hours of program observations and notes from attendance at nine monthly Éxito staff meetings. Finally, we performed analyses of student program attendance data from Congreso's UNIDAD database and student outcome data from the School District of Philadelphia.

Summary of Findings

This report provides a detailed description of the program activities, accomplishments and challenges of the first full year of Éxito implementation. Up front, we want to note what we believe are important "take-aways" from our research:

- Éxito's recruitment strategies were successful in enrolling the number of youth they hoped to reach. In addition, Éxito did enroll youth who had "early warning signs" for dropping out of school. However, these youth comprised roughly a third of the entire population of Éxito students. Recruiting youth at-risk for dropping out of school proved to be more challenging than anticipated.

- Students varied in their levels of participation in Éxito. A core group of students attended frequently over the course of the school year. However, a majority of enrollees were infrequent participants. Students most at-risk of dropping out were the most difficult to engage consistently.

- Two-thirds of the Éxito cohort was found to be on-track to graduation. However, a third remained off-track in each outcome area and will continue to require support with behavior, attendance and their course work to get back on track and stay in school.

- The most at-risk Exito students, ie., the students entering the program with poor grades, attendance and behavior in eighth grade, were more likely to improve their attendance and math grades than similar at-risk 9th graders who did not participate in Exito. In addition, they were promoted to 10th grade at a slightly higher rate than other 9th grade students with similar 8th grade profile. However, half or more of these students continued to be off-track, still experiencing significant attendance, behavioral and academic issues in ninth grade and will continue to need intensive supports in 10th grade.

- Nonetheless, the full program model—the after-school program and Primary Client Management (PCM) supports—did appear to make a significant difference for students. Students receiving the full program model had significantly better attendance than Éxito students not receiving PCM supports and other ninth graders at Edison high school. PCM students attended an average of 9 more days of school than other students.

- Attending the Éxito program also had benefits for students in terms of their school attendance and math grades. However, while these impacts were statistically significant, their degree of impact was slight. Nonetheless, this is an encouraging finding for the first year of the program and suggests that Éxito is moving in the right direction.

- As is to be expected for a program in its first full year of implementation, the after-school program experienced several challenges over the course of the year. In particular, it was difficult for the program to engage students in academic activities that met the remedial needs of large numbers of tutoring participants. Nonetheless, students were able to receive individual attention and support with homework, which appeared to be beneficial. Enrichment activities were somewhat more successful at engaging students, particularly after additional activities were added and students were allowed to choose from these.

- More supports may be needed for particular sub-groups of students within the Éxito program. These include English language learners (ELL) students, who reported difficulty interacting with English-speaking peers, and students referred to the program for behavioral challenges. ELL students requested separate activities because they experienced harassment from some English-speaking peers. And, while the program has a component to address the academic needs of students, no specific strategies exist within the after-school program to support students with behavioral challenges. Likely a result of this, many of the students entering the program with a history of behavioral challenges did not improve.

- Client management was seen as a major strength of the program by all stakeholders including students, staff and Edison tutors. Not only did it support engagement in the program-students who had a PCM attended the Éxito after-school more frequently—but tutors , CYS staff and PCM students reported changes in their motivation and behavior in school. However, the program was limited in its client management capacity during the first year as it was only able to serve a small proportion of the Éxito population.

- The interdepartmental collaboration as well as collaboration with Edison High School functioned well during the first year as evidenced through findings from qualitative analysis. However, greater trust seemed to exist at higher levels of the collaborations than at the ground level. In addition, staff turnover may require both collaborations to be rebuilt in the second year.

Overview of the Report

The report begins with a detailed description of the program model and its key components. It then turns to an examination of program enrollment and participation, followed by a report on student outcomes for the year. The outcomes section is followed by two chapters describing the strengths and challenges that were encountered in implementing the after-school component and client management services. A final chapter reports on the development of key collaborations with Edison High School and within Congreso. The report concludes with a summary of the findings and recommendations.

Chapter II
Éxito's Program Model

The Éxito program has several distinguishing characteristics. Its unique intervention model drew together after-school academic and youth development activities with client management services. It also aimed to serve a particular population of youth—ninth graders at risk for dropping out of school based on their eighth grade academic performance, attendance and behavior. The program model was intended to be multi-year, supporting the students through four years of high school. Finally, the program was based on key external and internal partnerships. It depended upon a partnership between Congreso and its neighborhood school, Edison High School, as well as collaboration between two Congreso departments, Children and Youth Services (CYS) and Neighborhood and Family Development (NFD) that provided different types of services.

Éxito's Origins

The Éxito program had existed in another form at Congreso before the current model was developed. The previous iteration focused first on work readiness, teaching job-related "soft skills" to teens and providing paid internships. The program later shifted to include an entrepreneurship class that took place at Congreso. The old Éxito program worked with 30 students in three cycles and was very successful in attracting youth. The organization felt that this was because—in addition to providing income—it tapped into adolescents' desire for real-world, career-oriented activities. With more than enough students signed up for each cycle, the previous iteration of Éxito was able to have selective recruitment and did not target students who were at risk for dropping out of high school. In fact, staff admitted students who were clearly motivated and ready for the demands of the program.

The organization wanted to build on this success and began to think about implementing the Éxito program in partnership with its neighborhood high school. In addition, Congreso wanted to better align its work with the goals of the Department of Human Services, one of Congreso's major funders. Recent studies on the Philadelphia dropout rate had linked truancy with failure to earn a diploma.[3] By developing a program that would address the urgent concern of getting students to graduate, the agency would indirectly help to resolve the truancy epidemic in its community.

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[3] Neild, R. C. & Balfanz, R. (2006).

Congreso leaders identified two main factors that they believed contributed to students dropping out: being academically behind and having social and family challenges that prevented one from succeeding in school. They recognized that the intervention model for the new program would require an academic component to address students' academic deficiencies and a client management feature to address social and family needs. Program designers incorporated the entrepreneurship class into the model as a motivational hook to engage students in the academic part of the program. The new Éxito project then capitalized on the varied capacities of Congreso divisions to serve a targeted population.

Éxito's Participants

The Éxito program targeted ninth graders at Edison High School, particularly those who were at risk for dropping out of school. Freshman year is a pivotal stage in an adolescent's educational career in which a student may face particular obstacles in adjusting to high school. In studies on the transition to high school students describe academic struggles, struggles adapting to a more complex environment than middle school, and struggles navigating new peer groups and new relationships with teachers.[4] Students who do not develop connections to peers and teachers begin to feel alienated from school and are likely to drop out.[5] Éxito's program developers acknowledged that the freshman experience poses unique challenges for students and hoped that their intervention could help to ease the transition to high school.

The group of ninth graders Éxito aimed to serve was comprised of first-time ninth graders who were experiencing challenges in addition to their transition to high school. These struggles were viewed as "early warning signs" for dropping out and positioned students to be off-track when they entered high school. Neild & Balfanz (2006) found that, by looking at indicators from middle school, it was possible to predict who might fail to graduate high school. Program staff drew on the criteria below in determining which students Éxito would target. An at-risk student was characterized as having at least one of the following eighth-grade conditions:

- failed math
- failed English
- attended school less than 80% of the time

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[4] Newman, B., Lohman, B., Newman, P., Myers, M., & Smith, V. (2000). Experiences of Urban Youth Navigating the Transition to Ninth Grade. *Youth & Society 31* (4), 387-416.

[5] Grossman, J. B. & Cooney, S. (2009). *Paving the Way for Success in High School and Beyond: The Importance of Preparing Middle School Students for the Transition to Ninth Grade*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

- earned 2 or more suspensions

Éxito's recruitment strategies, then, would need to engage this group of students who were already exhibiting signs of disengagement from school and encountering the stresses all ninth graders face in transitioning to high school.

Éxito's Organizational Context and Key Collaborations

Collaborations are never easy, and Éxito's success depended on two critical collaborations: one with Edison High School and the other between two Congreso divisions—each providing different services to the program. Partnerships between schools and community agencies often encounter predictable challenges including establishing common goals and sharing space.[6] Any collaboration, even one internal to an organization, goes through stages of team building and the development of trust and effective communication.[7] The development of a team, trusting relationships and communication structures were tasks that began during the pilot phase of Éxito and continued in the first year of the initiative.

Partnership with Edison High School

A partnership with Edison High School was essential to the intervention. Edison was asked to provide space for the program and to assist in identifying students to participate and teachers to serve as tutors. The school also allowed one program staff person, the academic coordinator, to be present in the school on a part-time basis. Edison was also asked to help promote Éxito and create a "buzz" about it among students and faculty. The school point person for Éxito was the ninth grade principal, but a relationship also existed with the school principal in which he could be contacted as necessary. Éxito staff arranged monthly meetings with Edison administration to enable regular communication about the program and to resolve any problems.

Interdepartmental Collaboration

Two Congreso divisions needed to collaborate to make the Éxito program work. As stated earlier, the after-school program staff was part of the Children and Youth Services (CYS) division while client

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[6] Walker, K. E., Grossman, J. B., Raley, R., Fellerath, V., & Holton, G. I. (2000). *Extended Service Schools: Putting Programming in Place*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.
  Walker, K. E. & Arbreton, A. J. A. (2001). *Working Together to Build Beacon Centers in San Francisco*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.
[7] Gajda, R. (2004). Utilizing Collaboration Theory to Evaluate Strategic Alliances. *American Journal of Education, 25,* 65-77.

management staff was based in the Neighborhood and Family Development (NFD) services division. CYS had expertise in running out-of-school time youth development programs, including job-related initiatives like the entrepreneurship program. It was new for CYS to run a program like Éxito that targeted a population of students who were disengaged from school and potentially experiencing other challenges.

Providing client management services was the primary role of the NFD division, which typically received clients from Philadelphia's Department of Human Services as well as the Juvenile Justice Center and Juvenile Probation Department. Client managers were trained to work with students and families experiencing some type of crisis. However, while NFD had run after-school programs in the past, it did not consider organized group activities for youth to be its area of expertise. Most work was one-to-one or with individual families.

Staff from these two divisions comprised the Éxito team. It included the vice presidents of each division, program managers and directors, three client managers, one academic program coordinator and one coordinator for enrichment. The team met weekly and expected to have one of the two vice presidents at each meeting. Once per month team members were joined by additional organizational leadership including Congreso's Vice President for Quality Assurance and the Senior Vice President of Programs.

Both collaborations involved a large number of people, but structures were in place at the beginning of the school year to support the development of these collaborations.

After-School Activities

The after-school program included two components: tutoring and enrichment. Research on after-school programs for teens underscores the challenge of engaging this age group in after-school activities. These studies reveal the importance of designing programs that meet adolescent needs. Effective programs are often characterized by the following:

- Staff who are trained to work with teenagers, can build caring and supportive relationships with them, and can support their academic learning
- Attention to accommodating and supporting friendship groups
- Sensitivity to participants' other responsibilities and flexibility in allowing varied attendance patterns

- Opportunities for youth to earn academic credits, prepare for college or jobs, and hold an internship
- Inclusion of youth in the design and operation of program activities

In addition, programs are appealing to adolescents if they are perceived as safe spaces that offer a variety of high-quality activities and have a strong incentive structure.[8]

Éxito operated Monday through Thursday immediately following the end of the school day (about 3 PM) until 4:15 PM on the third floor of Edison High School, the floor designated for ninth grade students, using up to nine classrooms and an office in one wing of the third floor. The after-school activities evolved through three phases: team building in October, implementation of the original program model from November to January and finally a revised model, which ran from February through June.

When the program began in October 2008, Éxito staff were still in the midst of intensive recruitment efforts and expected a significant number of new students to enroll throughout the month. The first month of the program was organized around team-building activities, which allowed students to easily enter the program at any time and get to know each other in a loosely structured format.

The project shifted into more structured programming in November, beginning with the testing of students' academic levels. Through the use of these assessments, students were assigned to a tutoring section. They were divided into three math and English tutoring groups based on their math performance. Participants rotated through tutoring and entrepreneurship activities with others in their tutoring section. English language learners (ELLs) had their own section and also stayed with the same group of students for tutoring and entrepreneurship. Initially, tutoring alternated weekly between math and English so that students could have two days per week with the same instructor who focused on one subject.

The program operated this way through January, but in February additional enrichment activities were offered along with entrepreneurship, which resulted in the alteration of the tutoring schedule to

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[8] Arbreton, A. J. A., Bradshaw, M., Metz, R., & Sheldon, J. P. S. (2008). *More Time for Teens: Understanding Teen Participation - Frequency, Duration, Intensity - in Boys & Girls Clubs*. Public/Private Ventures.

Herrera, C. & Arbreton, A. J. A. (2003). *Increasing Opportunities for Older Youth in After-School Programs*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.

Russell, C. A., Vile, J. D., Reisner, E. R., Simko, C. E., Mielke, M. B., & Pechman, E. (2008). *Evaluation of the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development Out-of-School Time Programs for Youth Initiative*. Washington, D.C.: Policy Studies Associates, Inc.

Walker, K. E. & Arbreton, A. J. A. (2001).

accommodate these. Furthermore, the teens chose the enrichment activity in which they would participate for the remainder of the school year. All students now had tutoring on Mondays and Tuesdays, alternating daily between math and English.

Tutoring

Tutoring was viewed as the foundation for the enrichment component, and this feature offered students a time and place to focus on remedial work or to enhance their academic skills. As the program began to test participants' skill levels, staff observed that many students were performing below grade level and in need of remediation. It was hoped that tutoring would create a safe environment for the youth to ask questions and receive remedial support.

The Éxito team designed the tutoring program to align with several best practices in the research literature. Staff hired certified teachers to serve as tutors and aimed to create small tutoring groups. Research suggests that tutoring has the greatest impact on students when the number of students ranges from 1-5 per adult.[9] With this in mind, Éxito staff aimed for small groups and set a 10-1 goal for the student-tutor ratio. In addition, tutoring took place for one hour twice per week, an attempt to ensure that students received the dosage of tutoring (45-80 hours per year) that research has found has an impact.[10] Moreover, it was arranged for Éxito's academic coordinator to have regular contact with classroom teachers so that tutoring efforts could efficiently align with classroom content. Program staff also reviewed students' academic progress each quarter. All of the above activities are identified as best practices in the tutoring literature.[11] Meanwhile, the instructional model for tutoring was still emerging. It did not include a curriculum but relied on teachers to develop their own activities.

Nine Edison teachers were signed on to serve as tutors for the program. They ranged in teaching experience from one to more than 20 years. Only two of the tutors that worked with the ninth-grade

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[9] Lauver, S., Little, P., & Weiss, H.B. (2004). *Moving beyond the barriers: Attracting and sustaining youth participation in out-of-school time programs* (Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation No. 6). Cambridge: Harvard Family Research Project.

[10] Lauer, P. A., Akiba, M., Wilkerson, S. B., Apthorp, H. S., Snow, D., & Martin-Glen, M. (2003). *The Effectiveness of Out-of-School-Time Strategies in Assisting Low-Achieving Students in Reading and Mathematics: A Research Synthesis* (ES). Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL).

[11] Office of the Under Secretary, Planning and Evaluation Service. (1997). *Evidence that Tutoring Works*. America Reads Challenge Resource Kit. America Reads Challenge, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from http://www.readingrockets.org/article/125#

Birmingham, J., Pechman, E. M., Russell, C. A., & Mielke, M. B. (2005). *Shared Features of High-Performing After-School Programs: A Follow-Up to the TASC Evaluation*. Policy Studies Associates, Inc.

participants were ninth-grade teachers during the school day.[12] Éxito staff did not want students to have participants' regular teachers in the after-school program because they wanted to prevent the potentially negative association of the program with school. One orientation and one optional professional development session were held for tutors, and these focused on youth development approaches as well as racial identity issues. Thereafter, Éxito organized a weekly meeting with tutors to discuss the progress of the program.

Enrichment Activities

The enrichment component of the after-school program offered activities that would be a fun and tap into the non-academic interests of students. It was also provided an opportunity for students to earn money through starting their own business. This element, which evolved over the course of the year, was viewed by many staff as "engagement" or "the hook" –the part of the program that would attract students to participate.

In the fall, students were assigned to an entrepreneurship class based on their tutoring group. As stated above, the schedule changed in February when new enrichment activities were added and took place on Wednesdays and Thursdays. These options existed concurrently with entrepreneurship and included dance, fitness and art. Dance was a particularly popular course.

The entrepreneurship program had been part of the pre-existing Éxito program and was based on a curriculum from the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE), a component chosen partly because it had a research base supporting its effectiveness. The curriculum takes students through the process of creating their own business using a series of classroom activities. Teens develop business plans and have opportunities to present them to various audiences, possibly earning capital to start their businesses. After the pilot period, Éxito staff decided to add supplemental materials that were available in Spanish, and a separate ELL entrepreneurship class was offered. In addition to serving as the hook, entrepreneurship was seen by some staff as fostering career exploration and providing an opportunity for students to apply their academic skills to real-world situations. Program staff expected that this experience would enhance students' motivation and feelings of competence, which may not have been reinforced through school.

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[12] Éxito also enrolled upperclassmen; see Chapter 3, Program Enrollment and Participation.

The content of each new enrichment activity was up to the facilitators or instructors that were hired. Enrichment staff, including the entrepreneurship instructors, had expertise in and/or were practitioners of what they provided but were not professional educators. Some were from community agencies while others were from local colleges.

Other Activities

One especially committed staff member formed a service club that convened on Fridays. This club was comprised of a small group of Éxito participants who mentored students at a local charter school. The teens became involved in other neighborhood service projects, such as the cultivation of a community garden. The club activities later grew to include recreational activities on the weekends. While the service club was not a part of the original program, it became an important experience for those students who participated.

In addition to Éxito's regular programming, students had the opportunity to take several field trips. These excursions acted as rewards for students who had consistent attendance, showed a positive attitude and/or recruited friends to the program. There were also various celebrations in which the families of participants were invited. Éxito concluded at the end of the school year with an award ceremony in June. Staff attempted to keep participants engaged throughout the summer by having them apply for summer jobs through Congreso's Youth Works program.

During the first year of the program, then, staff were in the midst of developing these program components and learning about the needs and interests of their adolescent participants. As to be expected in the first year of any program, staff made mid-course corrections to the program to better serve their student participants.

Client Management Services

The Primary Client Management (PCM) component of the Éxito program paired students who demonstrated acute personal or social service needs with individual client managers for a period of at least three months. In cases where they believed a student needed additional time with a client manager, they applied for extensions from the Department of Human Services (DHS), the entity through which the PCM program received its funding. In the program's first year, three client managers worked with 48 Éxito ninth graders in order to help them cope with problems at home and/or at school that sometimes translated into disruptive behaviors and academic failure. As part of helping remove the barriers to educational success for the student, client managers also acted as mentors and role models.

Client managers built relationships with students and their families through weekly or bi-weekly in-person and telephone contact. They were required to make at least two home visits per month in which the parent(s) and the student were present, but frequency of contact depended on the severity of the student's or the family's problems. For example, client managers met several times a week with clients who needed a lot of support. They did not typically attend the after-school program, but they kept track of students' program attendance and encouraged students to attend. The managers also kept track of participants' class attendance and progress in school, regularly visiting students at Edison during the school day. In addition to providing direct social and emotional support, they made referrals to social services when individual or family needs fell outside of their expertise or capabilities. Client managers were bilingual in Spanish and English, which enhanced their ability to work with Latino students and families.

The PCM approach was new to Congreso and assigned one client manager to a young client for the duration of his or her involvement with any of Congreso's programs, whereas in the past, individuals could have had different client managers for each service they were receiving. The PCM model consisted of a four-step process of intake, enrollment and assessment, and monitoring/follow-up. During the intake stage, Congreso staff collected a client's demographic information in order to determine eligibility for PCM services. Clients were then screened for any needs that required immediate attention or referral for services. Each eligible client was paired with a client manager who administered the Universal Assessment, which provided information about "educational attainment, employment, financial literacy, health, and related social needs."[13]

Through client management services, Éxito was positioned to create the important link between students' school lives and their neighborhood lives. Researchers of community-based dropout prevention programs have argued that community organizations can play an important role in building support networks and advocating for youth as students navigate the unique challenges of urban public schools.[14]

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[13] Congreso de Latinos Unidos. (2008).

[14] Rodriquez, L. F. & Conchas, G. Q. (2009). Preventing Truancy and Dropout Among Urban Middle School Youth: Understanding Community-Based Action From the Student's Perspective. *Education and Urban Society, 41,* 216-247.

Conclusion

The Éxito program model attempted to offer an array of services to students who were most at-risk for dropping out at Edison High School. Most program elements were delivered to students in their school, while client management reached into their homes to repair broken connections in students' academic and personal lives. The ambitious initiative drew on success stories in Congreso's history by providing career-oriented activities and incorporating research-based practices for the academic and enrichment features. The program design was relatively new for the agency and, as with most new programs, was perceived as a work in progress over the course of the 2008-09 school year. The chapters that immediately follow examine closely the levels of enrollment and participation as well as student outcomes.

Chapter III
Program Participation

It just seemed like it was gonna be fun, that's why I came. (Éxito participant)

The Éxito program was designed to serve students at Edison High School who were most at-risk for dropping out of school. The initial recruitment plan, as described in early program documents, was to enroll 140 first-time ninth grade students who met at least one of four eighth grade risk criteria.[15] According to program design, this cohort of ninth graders would remain in the program for two years of their high school career. As is common in high school-based Out-of-School-Time (OST) programs, however, the recruitment and retention of at-risk students became a challenge for program staff.[16] This chapter explores program enrollment and participation in four sections:

- First, a section on <u>recruitment</u> describes recruitment strategies, the characteristics of students the program was originally designed to serve, and how eligibility requirements were expanded in order to meet enrollment goals.

- A section on <u>enrollment</u> describes the students who were successfully recruited and enrolled into the program over the course of the school year, in comparison to the original eligibility criteria.

- A section on <u>level of participation</u> describes how long and how often students were engaged in the different components of the Éxito program.

- Finally, a section on <u>retention and attrition</u> looks at the level of attrition and strategies for keeping students engaged.

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[15] As delineated in Chapter 2, initial eligibility criteria required that enrollees be first-time ninth graders who presented with one or more of the following *eighth grade* risk factors: (a) failed math, (b) failed English, (c) 2 or more suspensions, and (d) less than 80% attendance.

[16] For literature on the challenges of recruiting and retaining youth in OST programs, see: Arbreton, A.J.A et al. (2008); Herrera, C., & Arbreton, A.J.A. (2003); Lauver, S. et al. (2004); Russell, C.A. et al. (2008).

Recruitment

As the first time going to scale, staff spent a significant amount of time and energy on recruitment efforts in the first year, in order to meet their enrollment goal of 140 students. Multiple strategies were used to attract students to Éxito, beginning before the launch of the program and continuing throughout the school year. In response to initially low enrollment numbers, Éxito staff added to their recruitment strategies, eased the intake process, and expanded the program's eligibility criteria. These changes in approach were successful in getting more students enrolled in the program but ultimately meant that many of the program's enrollees were *not* the teens most at risk for dropping out of high school, the population Éxito was originally designed to serve. However, this does not mean that students who enrolled did not need the supports provided by the program. Because of Philadelphia's tiered system of selective and non-selective high schools, students enrolling in non-selective neighborhood high schools like Edison often enter ninth grade underprepared and facing significant challenges.[17]

Recruitment Goals

Several factors influenced Congreso to set a goal of recruiting and enrolling 140 students into the Éxito program. One factor was a fee-for service arrangement with Philadelphia's Department of Human Services, which required that 140 students attend at least six times every month in order for Congreso to collect adequate revenue for the program. The direct relationship between enrollment and funding made recruitment a critical concern. A second factor influencing the enrollment goal was that Congreso's leadership wanted the number of ninth graders enrolled to provide a sufficiently large cohort to support RFA's outcomes study. It was important to Congreso that the Éxito program be large enough to quantifiably show that it was having an impact.

The enrollment goal of 140 students, which represented approximately 23% of Edison's ninth grade class, would prove challenging. Research has consistently shown that students become much harder to engage in OST programs after elementary school.[18] Programs for high-school-age youth must compete with jobs and family childcare responsibilities, as well as teenagers' growing autonomy and desire to spend social time with friends after school.[19] Unlike younger youth, high school students typically make

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[17] Gold, E., Evans, S.A., Haxton, C., Maluk, H., Mitchell, C., & Simon, E. (in press). *The Transition to High School: School Selection and Freshman Year Interventions in Philadelphia.* Philadelphia: Research for Action.
[18] Lauver, S. et al. (2004).
[19] Ibid.

their own decisions about what to do after school. Therefore, programs have to convince the students themselves, rather than parents, of the value of the after-school program. This is an especially difficult task for school-based dropout prevention programs like Éxito, which aim to attract disengaged students to a program that requires them to spend more time in school.

Given what prior research has shown about the challenge of engaging teens in OST programs, the difficulty the Éxito program experienced in reaching enrollment goals is not surprising and does not indicate that the program's recruitment strategies were ineffective. Instead, it shows that the enrollment goal was itself ambitious. In fact, staff made use of an extensive and diverse set of recruitment strategies, many of which were successful. In the end, after changes to their intake process and eligibility criteria, Éxito staff surpassed initial recruitment goals, enrolling 225 students.

Early Recruitment Strategies

The Éxito program staff began the first phase of recruitment in the summer of 2008. One of the earliest recruitment strategies was to call or visit the homes of rising ninth grade students who would likely attend Edison in the fall and who were at high risk for dropping out. The Éxito staff acquired lists of students from the schools where they had attended eighth grade and then determined who to visit or call based on whether the students met the criteria for enrollment. NFD client managers conducted 60 home visits between July and September.[20] The home visits, however, were challenging for several reasons. Sometimes the home addresses were inaccurate or no one was home. If they were home, students were sometimes unsure whether they would be passing into the ninth grade until they had completed summer school. In addition, early enrollment processes required parents and students to complete application forms at the same time. Often, client managers would encounter either a parent or a student at home but rarely both. Some staff felt that this recruitment strategy required significant time and did not result in many completed applications. With the beginning of the school year, recruitment efforts were expanded to include speaking at Edison's ninth grade orientation and at ninth grade assemblies, and meeting with lead teachers.

During the first recruitment phase, between August and late September 2008, Éxito implemented a demanding intake process adopted from the prior Éxito model, characterized by formality. Staff were to include both parents and students in the recruitment conversations. Then, students could not be fully

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[20] From program document "Agenda for Discussion with RFA and Congreso," September 4, 2008. Client managers from Congreso's Neighborhoods & Families Division (NFD) partnered with the Children & Youth Services (CYS) department in staffing the Éxito program. See Chapter 2 for a description of the program model.

enrolled until they went to Congreso with their parents and were interviewed. During interviews, students were asked to show that they understood the Éxito model, were motivated, and were willing to commit time to the program. Student interview performance was assessed using a point system. Students who were not dressed "appropriately" when they arrived at Congreso were asked to go home and return in more professional attire. Students and their parents were also expected to participate in an orientation that explained the goals of the program.

Changes in Recruitment Strategies

In interviews conducted in late September 2008, staff indicated that 48 program applications had been submitted and 18 intake interviews had been completed.[21] While recruitment numbers had grown significantly since the beginning of the school year, there was general agreement among Éxito staff that the recruitment process was progressing too slowly. As a result, they initiated a new phase in recruitment in late September with several important changes. First, they expanded their recruitment strategies to include visiting classrooms, asking teachers to recommend students, having the principal make announcements about the program over the loud speaker, offering incentives for students to bring friends, and networking through Congreso's larger client-base.

Second, the formal intake process that required students and parents to participate in interview and orientation activities at Congreso was eliminated. Finally, during this new phase of recruitment, the Éxito program expanded its original eligibility criteria to include upperclassmen, ninth-grade repeaters, and students who did not exhibit any of the four risk indicators in their eighth grade year—and were, therefore, at lower risk for dropping out of high school. First-time ninth graders remained a focus of recruitment efforts; staff set a new goal of enrolling 100 (and later, 70) first-time ninth grade students, and filled remaining slots with ninth grade repeaters or upperclassmen.

Students' Response to Recruitment Efforts

In our interviews and focus groups, we learned from students that most had initially learned about the Éxito program from one-on-one contact with one of the Éxito program coordinators, from classroom presentations, or from classmates. A few students also said that they learned about the program from their parents' caseworker or from a home visit. Students did not say that they learned about the

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[21] According to the program start dates entered in UNIDAD, 4 students were enrolled before October 6, and 92 were enrolled on October 6, the first day of the program.

program from school assemblies or principal announcements. It appears that personal contact with students or their parents was most effective in recruiting Éxito participants.

The research team observed that when Éxito was presented to parents and students, staff tended to emphasize the entrepreneurship component of the program, saying that it would be fun and give students the opportunity to make money, and tended to focus less on the tutoring component. In student focus groups, however, students did not frequently say that the entrepreneurship component had attracted them, although several later enrollees mentioned dance class as a draw.[22] They said instead that they came because it sounded fun and because they were looking for help with their grades. "*I signed up for the program because I was doing bad in classes and they said they'll help us with reading and math*," said one. In this way, the emphasis on entrepreneurship in recruitment efforts did not seem to match students' interests.

Enrollment

With the changes made in September and October 2008 in recruitment strategies and eligibility criteria, Éxito staff succeeded in enrolling a total of 225 students over the course of the school year, 164 of them ninth graders.[23] Figure 3.1 shows the number of ninth graders versus upperclassmen that were recruited and enrolled during different phases of the program year.

Figure 3.1 Students Enrolled Into the Éxito Program by Grade, 2008-09

	Before October 6, 2008	On October 6, 2008[24]	October 7, 2008 – January 31, 2009	February 1, 2009- May 15, 2009	TOTAL
9th graders	**4**	**92**	**38**	**30**	**164***
First-time	*4*	*75*	*28*	*26*	*133*
Repeaters	*0*	*5*	*9*	*3*	*17*
10th-12th graders	**0**	**3**	**44**	**14**	**61**
TOTAL	**4**	**95**	**82**	**44**	**225**

Source: Congreso UNIDAD
*There were 164 total ninth graders. We were missing data on 14 of these indicating whether they were first-time ninth graders or ninth-grade repeaters.

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[22] As described in Chapter 2, dance, art and fitness were added as three additional enrichment activities in February 2009, in response to students expressing that they were not all interested in entrepreneurship.
[23] Students in our analysis were those enrolled as of May 15, 2009. To determine students' grade in 2008-09, we relied on data from the School District and, when that data was missing, the grade was inputted from Congreso's UNIDAD database. The 2008-09 grade for 4 students was missing from both these sources; these students were excluded because we were unable to determine whether they were ninth graders or upperclassmen.
[24] October 6 was the first day of the program; many of the students recruited in late September and early October were officially enrolled and entered in UNIDAD on that day.

As Figure 3.1 shows, only four students had completed enrollment during the earliest phase of recruitment, all of whom were first-time ninth graders. Following changes to September's more restrictive eligibility criteria, staff were more effective in enrolling students, including students from *all* grades, many of whom did not present with "warning sign" risk factors (see Figure 3.2). Between October 7 and January 31, for example, only 28 (34.6%) of new enrollees were first-time ninth graders, while 9 (11.1%) were ninth-grade repeaters, and over half (44 or 54.3%) were upperclassman. Despite changes made to the program in early February designed to attract students, enrollment numbers decreased, although the proportion of first-time ninth grade enrollees between February and May (26 or 59.1% of new enrollees) was higher than in the prior recruitment phase.

All quantitative analyses in the remainder of this report include only the 164 ninth graders[25] who had been enrolled in the program and entered in Congreso's UNIDAD database as of May 15, 2009. Of these, 42 never attended the program, leaving 122 who attended at least one after-school session over the course of the year. In addition to tutoring and enrichment activities after school, 48 ninth graders received PCM services; six of these received *only* PCM services and did not attend after-school sessions. Figure 3.2 on the following page takes a closer look at the demographic and risk factor characteristics of *all* ninth graders who were recruited and enrolled into the Éxito program (including those who never participated), and then at the subsets of enrollees who participated at least once in the after-school and/or PCM components of the program. Missing data on each variable is reported in a note below the table.

After-School Students

As is evident in Figure 3.2, Éxito enrollees were equally male and female. The majority (86.1%) were Latino, and 22.9% were ELL students. These demographics are representative of Edison High School's total population which, according the School District website, is 80.1% Latino and 23.8% ELL students. Éxito enrollees, however, had a smaller proportion of special education students (12.7%) than Edison as a whole (24.4%).[26] This is likely indicative of Éxito's decision that it did not have sufficient resources to enroll students who had severe learning disabilities.

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[25] Includes repeaters.
[26] School District ethnicity data is for 2008-09; ELL and special education data is for 2007-08. See: https://sdp-webprod.phila.k12.pa.us/school_profiles/servlet/

Figure 3.2 Characteristics of Ninth Graders Enrolled Into the Éxito Program, 2008-09
(Missing data is reported below the table)

	All 9th grade enrollees (164)	Attended at least one after-school session (122)	Received PCM services (48)
Eighth Grade Risk Factors			
Failed Math	19 (16.1%)	12 (13.5%)	3 (9.1%)
Failed English	17 (14.4%)	11 (12.4%)	5 (15.6%)
Two or more suspensions	23 (18.5%)	12 (12.9%)	8 (24.2%)
Attended less than 80%	25 (18.7%)	16 (15.8%)	11 (30.6%)
Number of Risk Factors Exhibited			
No risk factors	90 (61.2%)	77 (68.8%)	25 (58.1%)
1 risk factor	33 (22.4%)	19 (17.0%)	10 (23.3%)
2 risk factors	21 (14.3%)	16 (14.3%)	7 (16.3%)
3 risk factors	3 (2.0%)	--	1 (2.3%)
Ninth Grade Repeater Status			
First-time 9th grader	133 (88.7%)	100 (90.9%)	36 (87.9%)
Repeating 9th grader	17 (11.3%)	10 (9.1%)	5 (12.2%)
Special Education Status			
Regular Education students	137 (87.3%)	104 (88.9%)	37 (82.2%)
Special Education students	20 (12.7%)	13 (11.1%)	8 (17.8%)
English Language Learner Status			
Non-ELL student	121 (77.1%)	91 (77.8%)	35 (77.8%)
ELL student	36 (22.9%)	26 (22.2%)	10 (22.2%)
Gender			
Female	83 (50.6%)	64 (52.5%)	23 (47.9%)
Male	81 (49.4%)	58 (47.5%)	25 (52.1%)
Ethnicity			
African American	21 (13.3%)	17 (14.4%)	6 (13.3%)
Asian	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.8%)	--
Latino/a	136 (86.1%)	100 (84.7%)	39 (86.7%)

Source: School District of Philadelphia

Note: Missing data reflects students for whom the District did not have data on a particular variable. "Eighth Grade Risk Factor" data was available for first-time ninth graders only; missing data includes ninth-grade repeaters. The "Number of Risk Factors Exhibited" variable reflects the number of risk factors for which the District had data on a student; for this variable, all first-time ninth graders are included, even if the District was missing data on any or all of the four risk factors, but ninth-grade repeaters are treated as missing data. Missing data on all variables are as follows. *For all 9th grade enrollees (N=164):* Failed Math (46), Failed English (46), Suspensions (40), Attendance (30), Count of Risk factors (17), Repeater (14), Special education (7), ELL (7), Gender (0), Ethnicity (6). *For 9th graders who attended at least one after-school session (N=122):* Failed Math (33), Failed English (33), Suspensions (29), Attendance (21), Count of Risk factors (10), Repeater (12), Special education (5), ELL (5), Gender (0), Ethnicity (4). *For 9th graders who received PCM services (N=48):* Failed Math (15), Failed English (16), Suspensions (15), Attendance (12), Count of Risk factors (5), Repeater (7), Special education (3), ELL (3), Gender (0), Ethnicity (3).

We also assessed the extent to which the Éxito program successfully enrolled and served its intended population of students at-risk for high school dropout. As Figure 3.2 shows, more than one third (38.7%) of first-time ninth-grade enrollees (including those who never attended the program) exhibited at least one of the four risk factors that were part of the program's original eligibility requirements. Because we based our count of risk factors on the data that was available, there may be additional students who met risk criteria but are counted here as "zero" because we did not have complete risk factor data for them; this is a limitation of several of the analyses in this chapter.

The percentage of ninth grade enrollees meeting risk criteria is likely as low as it is due to the relaxing of eligibility criteria early in the recruitment process, in order to meet enrollment goals. Figure 3.2 also shows that the proportion of students who met risk criteria was even lower (31.1%) among ninth graders who attended at least once. In other words, ninth graders who were most at risk for dropping out of high school appeared to be the hardest to engage in the program, often completing enrollment but never showing up after school. In the end, Éxito served many students who were not considered at high risk for dropping out, but who—as students in a large, neighborhood high school—stood to benefit from the additional support provided by the program.

PCM Students

The 48 students who received client management services did not differ significantly from other enrollees on most characteristics. As is evident in Figure 3.2, over half (58.1%) of PCM participants did *not* meet the original eligibility criteria, comparable to other Éxito participants. They were, however, *more likely* than other Éxito participants to have had less than 80% attendance and multiple suspensions in eighth grade.[27] Students were enrolled in client management services for a variety of reasons, many of which are not captured by the original risk criteria. Client managers explained that students assigned to a PCM were those who experienced academic, behavioral and/or psychological issues including domestic abuse, court involvement, problematic relationships with teachers and parents, school violence, depression, truancy, and other personal and academic problems. Records that client managers kept in the UNIDAD database suggest that many PCM students did have needs requiring extra support:[28]

- More than a third (36.7%) reported feeling unsafe in partner or family relationships.
- Forty percent (40.0%) reported that they were not passing their classes.
- Thirty percent (30.0%) reported that they were seeing a mental health or addiction therapist

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[27] N=134, Missing=30, *Chi-square*=4.592, *df*=1, *p*<.05
[28] Data reported here was from UNIDAD; N=31.

In other words, PCM services were important because of the additional challenges many students faced outside of school, which could serve as barriers to their academic progress.

Level of Participation

Students in the Éxito program varied in their level of participation. In this section, we measure students' level of participation in three ways:

Dosage – We look at the total number of after-school (tutoring and enrichment) sessions attended by enrollees, the number of minutes of client management services they received, and the number of times they attended the service club.

Intensity of participation – We also look at the average number of after-school sessions attended <u>per month</u> that students were enrolled in the program, to gain a sense of the frequency and consistency of students' engagement with the program.

Average daily attendance – Finally, we looked at the average number of ninth graders who attended after-school activities over the course of the year.

Dosage

While 164 ninth graders completed the enrollment process, 122 actually attended at least one session of Éxito's after-school tutoring and enrichment activities (see Figure 3.3). The number of sessions attended by these 122 students, however, varied significantly, with 50 attending between 1 and 10 times, and just over half (72 participants) attending more than ten sessions over the course of the school year. Research on tutoring programs suggests that students who attend 45 tutoring sessions make positive gains.[29] Among Éxito enrollees, 25 students (15.2%) attended 45 or more after-school sessions total in 2008-09.

Figure 3.3 also shows the number of after-school sessions attended by the 57 enrollees who met the program's initial eligibility criteria by being first-time ninth graders and exhibiting at least one of the four eighth-grade risk factors. Of these students, 38.6% never attended after-school activities, 31.6% attended 10 or fewer, and only 7.0% (4 students) attended at least 45 sessions. The lower program attendance among these students in comparison with all ninth grade enrollees suggests that students

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[29] Lauer, P. A. et al. (2003).

who were most at-risk for dropping out of high school were also the most difficult to engage consistently in the Éxito program's after-school activities.[30]
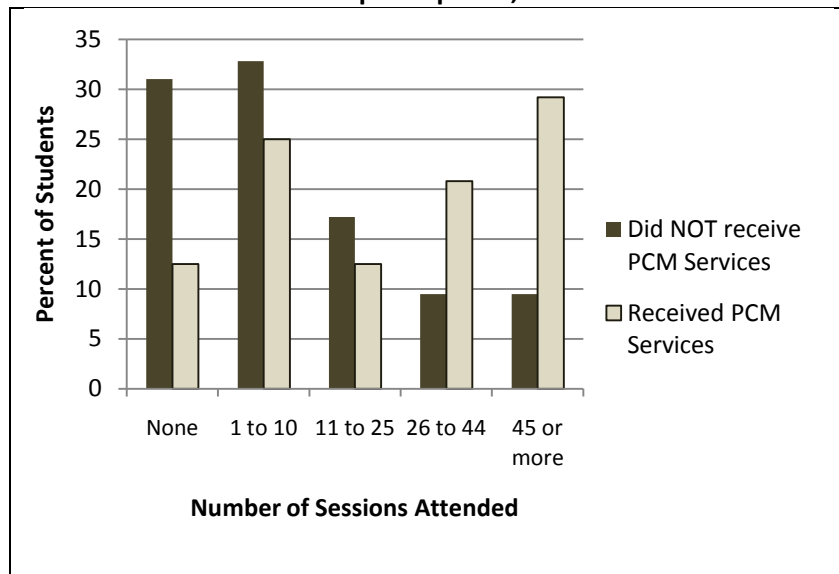
Figure 3.3 Number of After-School Sessions Attended by Éxito Participants, 2008-09

	All 9th grade enrollees (N=164)	9th-grade enrollees meeting eligibility criteria (N=57)
None	42 (25.6%)	22 (38.6%)
1 to 10	50 (30.5%)	18 (31.6%)
11 to 25	26 (15.9%)	5 (8.8%)
26 to 44	21 (12.8%)	8 (14.0%)
45 or more	25 (15.2%)	4 (7.0%)

Source: Congreso UNIDAD

We found, however, that the 48 ninth graders who were also receiving client management services (18 of whom met the eligibility criteria[32]) were more likely to have attended a higher number of tutoring and enrichment sessions over the course of the year than students who were not receiving client management services (see Figure 3.4). This finding is important because it supports existing research that personal relationships with high school youth can be an effective way to engage them in OST programs.[33] In interviews, program staff echoed this belief. As one staff member explained, "*Success in retention is because staff were able to build relationships with students*." The program staff

Figure 3.4. Number of After-School Sessions Attended by PCM and Non-PCM Exito participants , 2008-09[31]

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[30] When this analysis is run as a cross-tabulation comparing those meeting risk criteria to those who did not meet risk criteria (based on data available), the difference in dosage is statistically significant (N=164, *Chi-square*=12.533, *df*=4, *p*<.05).

[31] N=150, *Chi-square*=16.307, *df*=4, *p*<.01

[32] See Figure 3.2.

[33] Lauver, S. et al. (2004); Barr, S., Birmingham, J., Fornal, Klein, & Piha. (2006). Three high school after-school initiatives: Lessons learned. *New Directions for Youth Development, 2006* (111), 67-79.

from all divisions of Congreso perceived the PCMs to be particularly effective at building relationships with students.

Figure 3.5 Hours spent with PCM, 2008-09

	Number of 9th graders (N=48)
Under 1 hour	6 (12.5%)
1 to 9.9	27 (56.3%)
10 to 19.9	7 (14.6%)
20 to 30	2 (4.2%)
More than 30	6 (12.5%)

Source: Congreso UNIDAD

In addition to the significant range in students' participation in after-school sessions, there was also variation in their participation in the PCM component of the program, as well as in the service club.[34] Of the 48 students who received PCM services, the number of minutes of service each one received ranged from five minutes to 40.1 hours, with a median of 6.2 hours. Because of the high level of variation (SD = 11.1), we use the median instead of the mean as a measure of central tendency. Figure 3.5 summarizes hours of PCM services for the 48 ninth graders who participated. As is evident in the table, over half of PCM students received between one and ten hours of PCM service over the course of the year. Six students appear to have been highly engaged with their client managers, receiving over 30 hours of service.

Finally, in addition to the after-school and PCM components of the Éxito program, 39 ninth graders attended at least one of 17 service club activities. Of these, nearly half (48.7%) attended only once. Our analysis shows that those who attended the service club *even just one time* over the course of the year attended more Éxito after-school sessions. In fact, 19 of the 25 total ninth graders who attended at least 45 after-school sessions were service club participants.

Intensity

In addition to the total amount of services or "dosage" a participant received, we also looked at the frequency of their participation. Specifically, we looked at the average number of after-school sessions students attended *per month that they were in the program.* In the average month, after-school sessions met approximately 14 times. We grouped the 122 ninth grade students who attended at least one after-school session into four categories according to their intensity of participation in the after-school

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[34] The service club was not a component of the original program design, but was developed by an Éxito staff member partway through the year. See Chapter 2 for a description of all program components, including the service club.

component of the program: those who attended at least 10 sessions, on average, per month; those who attended six to nine times per month; those attending one to five times per month; and those who averaged fewer than one session per month.

Figure 3.6 Intensity of Attendance in After-School Sessions, 2008-09[35]

	Number of 9th grade attendees (N=122)	9th grade attendees meeting eligibility criteria (N=35)
10 or more sessions per month	18 (14.8%)	3 (8.6%)
6 to 9 sessions per month	24 (19.7%)	7 (20.0%)
1 to 5 sessions per month	66 (54.1%)	21 (60.0%)
Less than once a month	14 (11.5%)	4 (11.4%)

Source: Congreso UNIDAD

Figure 3.6 shows that approximately one third (42 or 34.4%) of ninth grade attendees participated in after-school sessions six or more times per month, or more than once a week. However, two thirds (65.6%) were infrequent attenders, attending five or fewer times per month. Intensity of attendance (average sessions per month) was similar for the subset of ninth grade attendees who met at least one of the eighth grade risk criteria to those who did not, with just under one third (28.6%) attending six or more times per month and the majority (71.4%) attending no more than five times per month.

At first glance, the fact that students meeting the risk criteria attended after-school sessions with similar *intensity* to those who did not meet the criteria appears to contradict the finding we reported above that students meeting the risk criteria received a significantly lower *dosage* (attended fewer total sessions) than other Éxito ninth graders. The reason for this apparent discrepancy is twofold. First, students meeting risk criteria were more likely than other Éxito ninth graders to enroll but *never* attend (giving them a dosage of zero), and were therefore not included in our measurement of intensity. Second, and more significantly, students meeting risk criteria were, on average, enrolled in the program for fewer days overall[36] and discontinued attendance before the end of the program year at a higher rate than other Éxito ninth graders (see "Retention and Attrition" below). Their shorter duration in the program, on average, meant that students with risk factors attended fewer sessions overall (dosage) than students with no risk factors, but, as seen in Figure 3.6, the number they attended per month that they were enrolled (intensity) was comparable to those with no risk factors.

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[35] Table does not include enrollees who never attended after-school sessions.
[36] N=164, t=2.587, df=162, p<.05

Average Daily Attendance

There was relatively little variation in daily attendance at Éxito's after-school sessions over the course of the year. Figure 3.7 below graphs the changes in the average number of ninth graders who showed up for sessions after school by month. Monthly averages ranged from 25 to 29 ninth grade attendees per day, despSite modifications in the program design made in early February. In fact, February's average

Figure 3.7 Average Number of Ninth Graders Attending
After-School Sessions
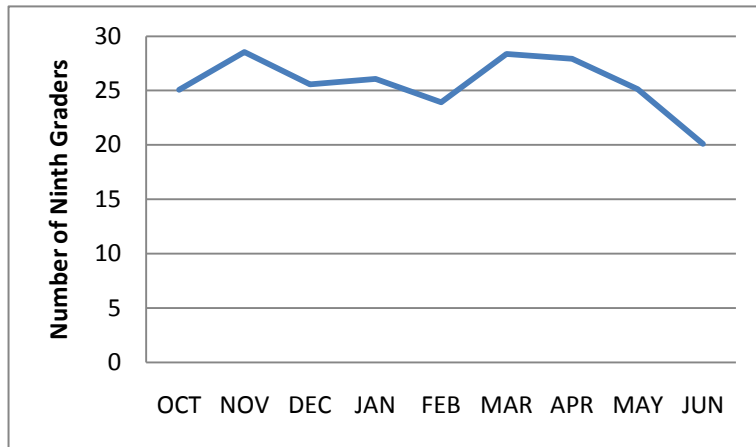
daily attendance was just below 25 (23.9 ninth graders/day). In March, however, we see a boost in attendance (to 28.4 ninth graders/day), which may reflect a higher level of engagement due to the addition of dance, art, and fitness activities in February. Attendance in June was noticeably lower than in any other month, with an average of 20.1 ninth graders in attendance on any given program day.

Source: Congreso UNIDAD

Retention and Attrition

Over the course of the school year, half (51.8%) of ninth grade enrollees discontinued participation in the program. Éxito staff considered students active in the program as long as they attended at least one session a month. By June 1, 2009, 79 ninth graders were still enrolled and active in the Éxito program. Attrition was higher among students who met at least one eighth grade risk criteria than students who did not.[37] We also found that retention was higher among PCM students than other enrollees—they were more likely to still be enrolled as of June 1, 2009.[38] The same was true of students who attended the service club at least one time.[39] Again, this suggests that the ongoing relationship-building of both the PCM component and the service club encouraged students to stay engaged with the Éxito program.

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[37] This difference approaches but does not achieve statistical significance (N=164, *Chi-square*=3.208, *df*=1, *p*=.073).
[38] N=164, *Chi-square*=7.322, *df*=1, *p*<.01
[39] N=164, *Chi-square*=27.221, *df*=1, *p*<.001

Considering the high level of attrition, common among OST programs, Éxito staff made efforts focused on retaining those students who were enrolled in the program. A number of the retention strategies that they used were in alignment with recommendations from prior research about how to keep older youth engaged in OST programs. Staff made efforts both to re-engage students who never attended the after-school sessions and to retain those that did attend, at least sporadically. For students who did not attend the program, re-engagement activities included calling the students' homes, pulling students out of class, and talking to students in the hallway about coming to the program. Program staff also tried to eliminate barriers to students' attendance by resolving transportation issues, reassigning students to after-school classes that were a better match for their needs, and attempting to improve snacks. For those students who attended Éxito, the primary retention strategy was to provide students with incentives for their continued participation. For example, students who attended regularly and behaved well were permitted to go on Congreso-organized field trips. Students were also told that they could earn jobs at Éxito if they continued to attend the program regularly.

In focus groups, we asked students who came to the program regularly why they chose to attend. The students said that they enjoyed dance class and were attracted by supplemental activities such as the service club and field trips. Other students said that they came to the program because it was better than being bored at home. Food had an important role in attendance. Some students said they came to the program specifically to get a snack; others said that they did not come because the snacks were inadequate. Students' comments suggest that if the program did not provide appealing snacks, they would leave. As one student said "*Sometimes I don't come, because, I am hungry after school*." Some students were disappointed with the snacks that Éxito did provide, noting in particular that pretzels were not appealing to them.

Students who were not regular attendees offered several reasons for not participating in the program, or for participating only sporadically. The most common reason mentioned was that the program was boring, felt too much like school, and did not meet students' expectations. Other students said they did not come to the program because it conflicted with other responsibilities after school, such as babysitting. A third reason for not attending, mentioned by both students and program staff, was that youth were confused by frequent and unexpected changes in the program. Programmatic modifications that occurred throughout the year included changes in the program's weekly schedule, changes in class assignment, the addition of enrichment activities (dance, art, fitness), and instructor turnover. Both

students and program instructors thought these changes had a negative impact on retention because students did not know where to go when they came to the program:

> Interviewer: Why are there problems with retention and attendance?
>
> Tutor: Changes in the schedule. It's inconsistent ... They still come every single day but then they wouldn't know where to go and we would lose a lot of kids within that 15 minutes because they didn't know where to go. There's only 3 people in the hallway to help them. There are 40 kids standing there. They get frustrated and they leave.

The modifications made to the program mid-year were an important step in responding to some of the challenges encountered in the program's first year of implementation. However, feedback from students and staff, including the tutor quoted here, suggest that unless programmatic changes are communicated clearly to participants, perhaps during an opening gathering and announcement time, students might find them disruptive and choose to leave.

Conclusion

Overall, recruitment, engagement, and retention were key challenges in the first full year of the Éxito program. Initial recruitment efforts resulted in few completed enrollments, but with changes in both the eligibility criteria and intake process, program staff surpassed enrollment goals, ultimately recruiting and enrolling 225 students, including students from all grades and students with or without risk factors. In focus groups, students told us that they most often enrolled in the program because of one-on-one contact with Éxito staff or from classmates. They chose to participate for fun or because they wanted to improve their grades. What most kept them coming, they said, were field trips, some of the enrichment activities, and food.

In this chapter, we took a closer look at ninth grade enrollees. In this cohort, students' level of engagement in Éxito after-school activities varied significantly. We found that students who were most at risk for dropping out of high school attended fewer after-school sessions, on average, than other enrollees. PCM students, however, regardless of risk factors, were more likely to attend more after-school sessions and remain enrolled in the Éxito program through the end of the year. We found the same to be true of students in the service club. These findings suggest that one-on-one contact and relationship-building are key to both recruitment and retention in the Éxito program.

Points for Discussion

As the first year of the Éxito program came to a close, Congreso staff began thinking about recruiting students for the second year of the program. The program is designed to serve students at risk for dropping out of high school and this intention raised discussion among program staff. In meetings, Congreso staff talked about returning their focus to recruiting incoming ninth graders who met the original eligibility requirements, as well as continuing to serve the existing cohort. Several points for discussion emerge from this year's evaluation that may contribute to the conversation about recruitment, engagement, and retention:

- One-on-one contact between Éxito staff and potential enrollees appears to be the most effective recruitment strategy. Some Edison students were successfully recruited through contact that *other* Congreso programs had with them or their parents. Staff should consider ways to use one-on-one recruitment strategies, particularly for those meeting risk criteria.

- It was very challenging for program staff to recruit enough students from the intended population (first-time ninth graders at risk for high school dropout) to reach enrollment goals. They ultimately enrolled only 57 who met initial eligibility criteria. The program staff will need to consider whether their priority is to enroll a large cohort with less stringent eligibility criteria, or a smaller cohort who present with the eighth grade risk factors predictive of high school dropout.

- Student and staff responses indicate that the inconsistent participation in the program, and the high level of attrition, were exacerbated by the changes made to the program mid-year. Students might be more receptive to changes if a) student input plays a role in deciding what changes will be made, b) changes happen in an expected way, and c) changes are communicated in a way that is clear and consistent, perhaps during an opening gathering and announcement time that separates the school day from the Éxito programming.

- It appears that food could play an important role in attracting and retaining students in the Éxito program.

Chapter IV
Éxito Student Outcomes

Even though the Éxito program was still at an early stage of development, the evaluation took a first look at program outcomes. It is often difficult to detect program outcomes in the first few years of a program due to normal challenges and development that takes place. Nonetheless, examining program outcomes, in conjunction with implementation data, can give program developers insights into aspects of the program that may be working well and those that may need greater attention. To conclusively demonstrate Éxito's impact, however, it will be important to see if patterns reported in this analysis hold in later years for the first cohort and subsequent cohorts. This chapter of the report provides information about how ninth grade participants of the Éxito program fared during this first year of Éxito.

The analysis of student outcomes includes both descriptive findings, reporting outcomes and progress of the participants at the end of the ninth-grade year and comparative findings, examining student outcomes in comparison to other ninth graders at Edison High School. Descriptive findings are reported for the entire sample of first time ninth graders who attended the program at least one time and particular sub-groups—students who met the original risk criteria and those receiving PCM services. The comparative analysis is conducted with the entire sample of first-time ninth graders who attended the program at least one time.[40]

The analysis looked at four outcome areas that indicate whether a student is on track to graduation. The outcome areas include attendance and suspensions as well as achievement outcomes (math and English course passage). Math course analysis used grades from Algebra 1 or more advanced courses. During their freshman year, most of the ninth graders were enrolled in Algebra 1, but those who placed out of this class took geometry. Similarly, the analysis of English grades focused on the English 1 course. All students were assigned to English 1 while students requiring remedial English also took Intensive or Strategic English.
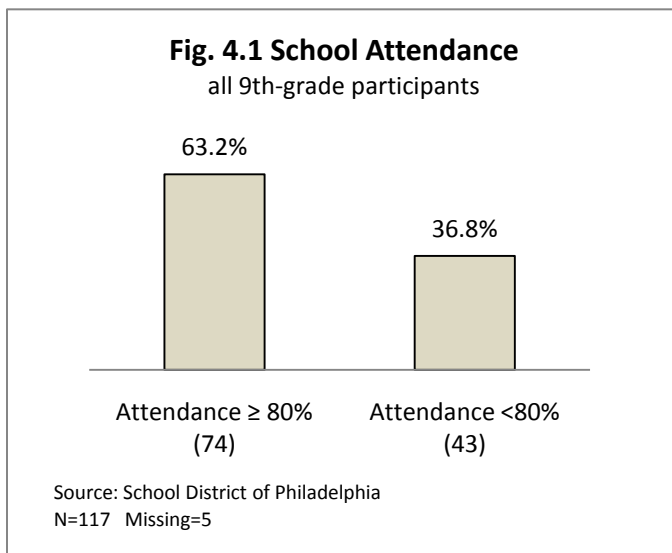
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[40] For the total sample of Éxito participants attending one or more sessions, there were 100 first-time ninth graders, 10 repeat ninth graders, and 12 students with unknown status.

Sample size should be considered when viewing the student outcomes. Although the sample size for all ninth-grade participants is reasonably large, sub-groups range from 11 to 35 students, and in some instances missing data influences these numbers. The structure of this chapter follows:

- The first part of the chapter describes the status for all Éxito participants at the end of ninth grade.
- The next sections focus on sub-groups of participants who met the original risk criteria or who received client management services. For students meeting the original risk criteria, we report on their progress from eighth grade. For PCM students we report on both their status at the end of ninth grade as well as progress from eighth grade.
- Finally, we share the results of the comparative analysis for each of the key outcome areas: attendance, math and English grades and suspensions.

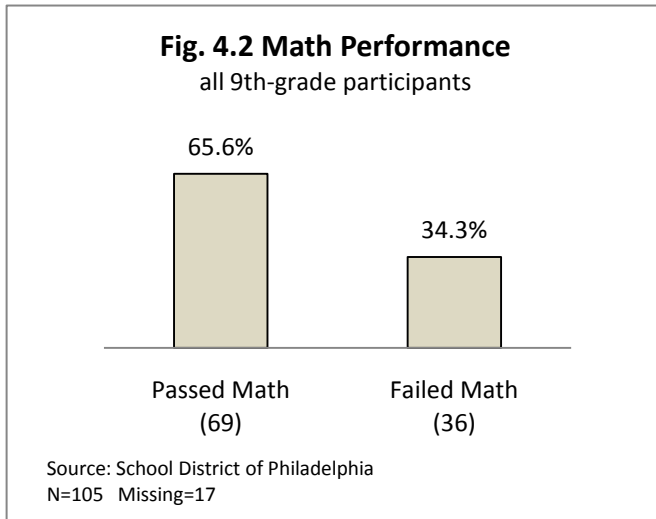## Status at the End of Ninth Grade—All Éxito Participants

This first section of this chapter focuses on student outcomes for the 122 ninth graders who attended one or more after-school sessions. Based on the data for all ninth-grade Éxito participants, there is evidence that most of the students are progressing toward high school graduation. However, at least a third of students appear to be off-track in each indicator area.

Fig. 4.1 School Attendance
all 9th-grade participants

63.2%

36.8%

Attendance ≥ 80%
(74)

Attendance <80%
(43)

Source: School District of Philadelphia
N=117   Missing=5

Attending school more than 80% of the time suggests that students are on-track to graduation. Students who attend less than 80% (missing 37 or more days) are at increased risk of dropping out of school. In fact, a student with more than 20 unexcused absences in the school year is defined as truant. As shown in Figure 4.1, most of the Éxito participants attended school on a regular basis. More specifically, close to two-t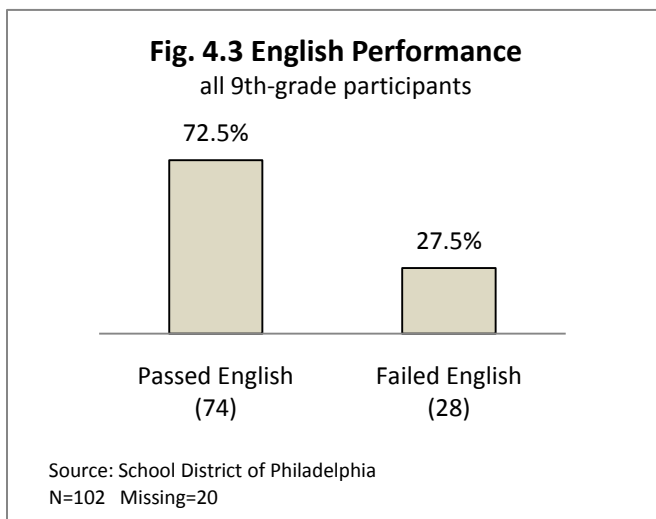hirds (63.2%) were present for 80% or more of the school days. However, more than a third was absent a significant number of days. Our data do not show whether these absences were excused or unexcused, but it is possible that some of these students

were truant. This pattern is important for program staff to recognize as they consider interventions for the cohort in tenth grade. A significant group of students may need support in removing barriers to school attendance. However, these outcomes are not necessarily a reflection on the impact of the Éxito program. Attendance declines for ninth graders overall, and for this reason we will look at the school attendance of the Éxito participants compared to other ninth graders at Edison High School in a later section of this chapter.

Fig. 4.2 Math Performance
all 9th-grade participants

65.6%

34.3%

Passed Math
(69)

Failed Math
(36)

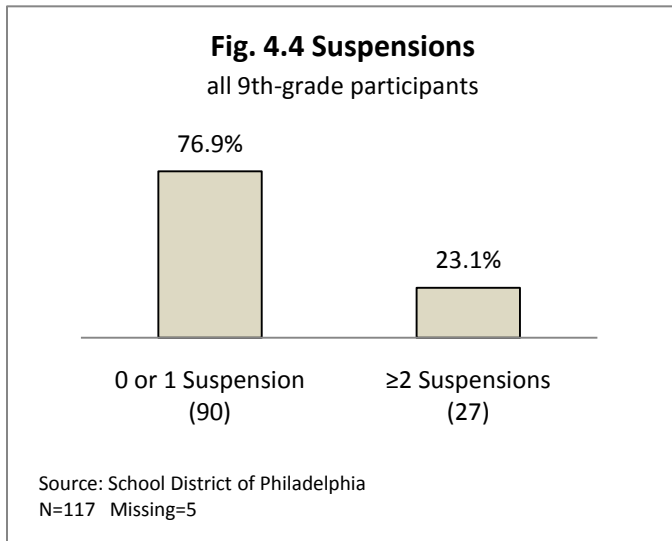Source: School District of Philadelphia
N=105   Missing=17

Course passage of major subjects like math and English at the end of ninth grade are also indicators of the likelihood students will stay in school and graduate. Students who fail these subjects at the end of ninth grade are more likely to drop out at some point in the future. Figure 4.2 displays that approximately 66% of the freshmen involved in Éxito passed math (Algebra 1 or higher course), while about one third (34.3%) of students failed. Again, this

suggests that one third of students in the Éxito cohort need intensive math supports in tenth grade to get back on-track to graduation. However, many ninth graders at Edison may have failed Algebra 1 and the comparative analysis will examine whether Éxito participants failed at a similar rate as other ninth graders.

Fig. 4.3 English Performance
all 9th-grade participants

72.5%

27.5%

Passed English
(74)

Failed English
(28)

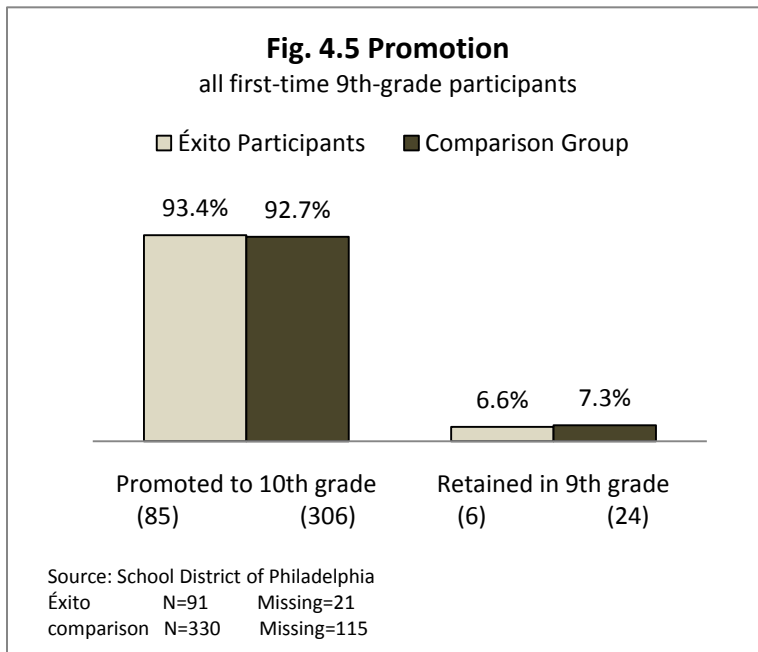Source: School District of Philadelphia
N=102   Missing=20

Most Éxito participants fared relatively well in their English 1 course. We found that while about 28% missed the mark in this subject, nearly three-quarters (72.5%) passed (See Figure 4.3). While the majority of Exito students did well in their English course, it will be important not to overlook the needs of more than one quarter of Éxito participants

who continue to require literacy support in tenth grade to progress toward graduation.

Fig. 4.4 Suspensions
all 9th-grade participants

76.9%

23.1%

0 or 1 Suspension   ≥2 Suspensions
(90)   (27)

Source: School District of Philadelphia
N=117   Missing=5

Being suspended multiple times in ninth grade is another warning sign for dropping out of school. Again, a sizable number of students —27—committed repeat offenses in ninth grade, resulting in 2 or more suspensions (See Figure 4.4). However, seventy-seven percent (76.9%), a large majority, were either not subjected to formal disciplinary action at all or only one time during the school year. The comparative analysis will show how this rate compared to other ninth graders at Edison High School. But, it will be important for the program to consider the needs some Éxito participants will have regarding the management of their behavior in tenth grade.

Fig. 4.5 Promotion
all first-time 9th-grade participants

☐ Éxito Participants   ■ Comparison Group

93.4%   92.7%

6.6%   7.3%

Promoted to 10th grade   Retained in 9th grade
(85)   (306)   (6)   (24)

Source: School District of Philadelphia
Éxito   N=91   Missing=21
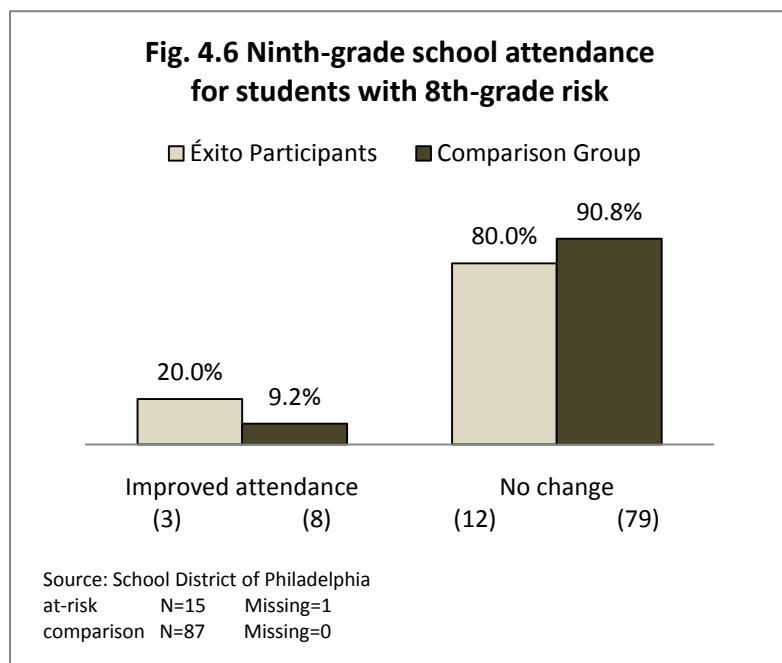comparison   N=330   Missing=115

Finally, we looked at promotion and retention of the ninth graders. For this analysis, we excluded participants who repeated ninth grade in 2008-09. Figure 4.5 shows that almost all members of the cohort are now in tenth grade. While 93.4% of the Éxito participants progressed into their sophomore year of high school, about 7.3%of them wereretained in ninth grade for the 2009-10 school year. This finding is surprising considering the high numbers of students who missed a significant amount of school and failed math and/or English. A similar group of ninth graders, designated the "comparison group," had almost equal rates of promotion and retention—however, these were slightly less favorable.

Participants with at Least One Risk Factor in Eighth Grade

It is particularly important to address outcomes for the students who were most at risk of dropping out based on the five indicators discussed above. Results of this analysis should inform program designers about the extent to which Éxito has addressed the needs of the population that was initially targeted for dropout prevention. The data shared below refer to first-time ninth-grade participants who had at least one risk factor and attended at least one Éxito session during 2008-09.

As reported in the previous chapter on student enrollment and participation (See Figure 3.3), slightly more than 50% of the at-risk participants (not enrollees) attended only 1-10 after-school sessions. Therefore when perceiving the outcomes concerning attendance, behavior and achievement, it is essential to consider that these particular students were not as immersed in the program as other students. It is possible that their progress would have been greater had their participation levels been higher.

Fig. 4.6 Ninth-grade school attendance for students with 8th-grade risk

□ Éxito Participants   ■ Comparison Group

Source: School District of Philadelphia
at-risk   N=15   Missing=1
comparison   N=87   Missing=0

As Figure 4.6 shows, of the Éxito students with attendance risk in eighth grade, approximately 20% (3 students) demonstrated improvement in ninth. Unfortunately, a large majority (80%) failed to improve during their first year of high school. The comparison group of ninth graders, which also consisted of students with poor attendance in eighth grade, exhibited a lower rate of improvement and more stagnancy than the small treatment group. Over 90% of the most at-risk students in the comparison group continued to miss a significant number of school days in ninth grade.
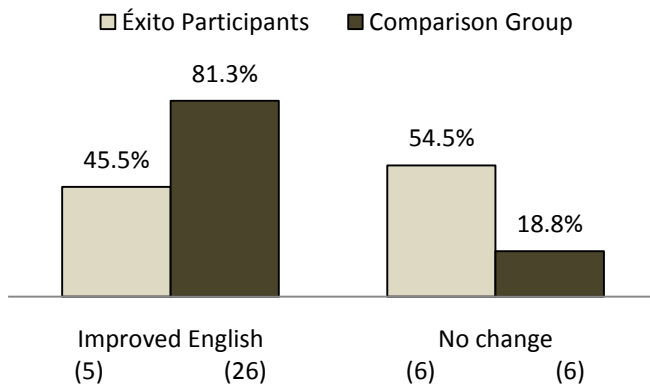
Fig. 4.7 Ninth-grade math performance for students with 8th-grade risk

☐ Éxito Participants   ■ Comparison Group

66.7%   66.7%
      33.3%   33.3%

Improved math   No change
(8)   (13)   (4)   (26)
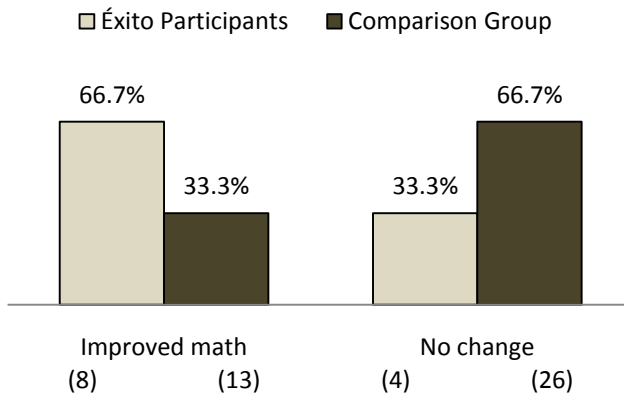
Source: School District of Philadelphia
at-risk   N=12   Missing=0
comparison   N=39   Missing=8

Figure 4.7 reveals that two-thirds (66.7%) of the at-risk Éxito students passed math in ninth grade after failing in eighth. Eight (8) participants moved out of this risk category. At the same time, one-third (33.3%) of them showed no change, failing the subject. A reverse trend is evident for the comparison group, which experienced much more difficulty in passing math courses. Only one-third improved while two-thirds failed math again in ninth grade.
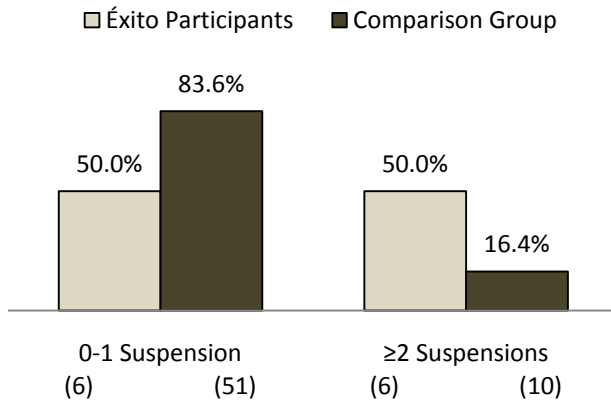
Fig. 4.8 Ninth-grade English performance for students with 8th-grade risk

☐ Éxito Participants   ■ Comparison Group

             81.3%
             54.5%
45.5%   18.8%

Improved English   No change
(5)   (26)   (6)   (6)

Source: School District of Philadelphia
at-risk   N=11   Missing=0
comparison   N=32   Missing=7

As Figure 4.8 shows, the difference between the percentages of students improving in English and staying the same is about even for Éxito participants. Among the students who failed English in eighth grade, nearly half (45.5%) exhibited growth during their first year of high school. The comparison group outperformed the treatment group in this category since it improved at a much higher rate (81.3%).
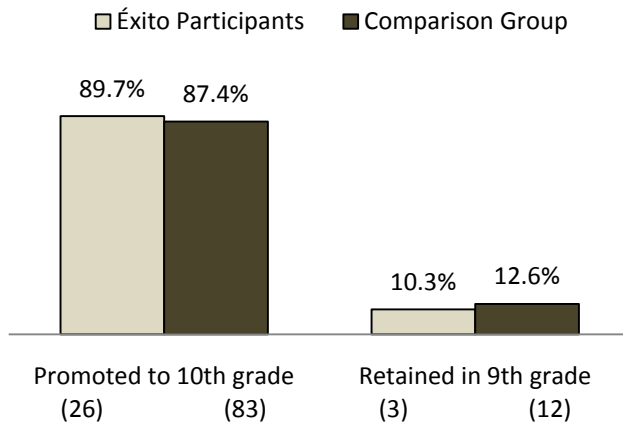
Fig. 4.9 Ninth-grade suspensions for students with 8th-grade risk

☐ Éxito Participants   ■ Comparison Group

0-1 Suspension: 50.0% (Éxito), 83.6% (Comparison)
≥2 Suspensions: 50.0% (Éxito), 16.4% (Comparison)

0-1 Suspension
(6)   (51)

≥2 Suspensions
(6)   (10)

Source: School District of Philadelphia
at-risk   N=12   Missing=0
comparison   N=61   Missing=0

For the Éxito group, the number of students who reduced multiple suspensions from eighth grade is equal to the number of students who showed no change in ninth grade. Figure 4.9 provides data for twelve (12) of these students, 50.0% of which fell into each category. This is another category in which the comparison group performed better: about 84% of non-Éxito participants were suspended either not at all or only once during ninth grade.

Fig. 4.10 Promotion for students with 8th-grade risk factor(s)

☐ Éxito Participants   ■ Comparison Group

Promoted to 10th grade: 89.7% (Éxito), 87.4% (Comparison)
Retained in 9th grade: 10.3% (Éxito), 12.6% (Comparison)

Promoted to 10th grade
(26)   (83)

Retained in 9th grade
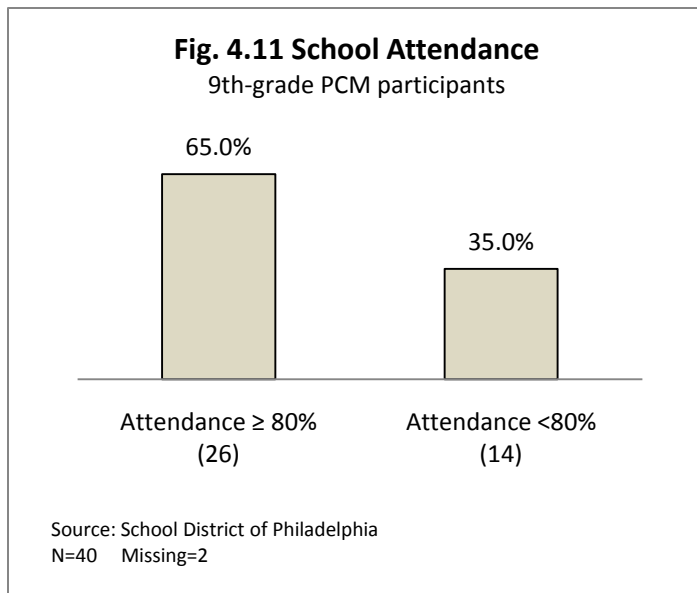(3)   (12)

Source: School District of Philadelphia
at-risk   N=29   Missing=6
comparison   N=95   Missing=51

Based on Figure 4.10, almost 90% of the Éxito participants most at risk for dropping out were promoted to grade 10. This is similar to the percentage of students in the comparison group (87.4%). Few students from each group were retained in the ninth grade. Promotion is a major indicator of a student's progress toward graduation, and the data reveal that the at-risk Éxito group is moving forward at a slightly higher rate than the at-risk group that did not receive the intervention.
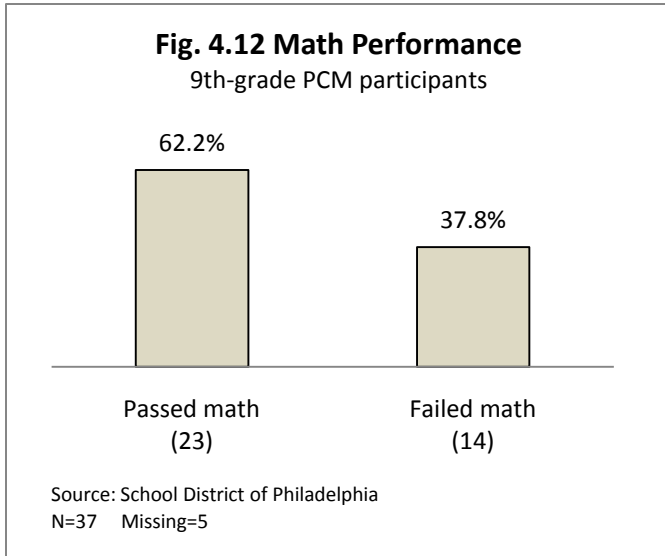
Participants Receiving PCM Services

Students receiving Primary Client Management (PCM) services comprise another sub-group of interest—the outcomes of which help to determine Éxito's ability to support students with unique challenges external to school life. Like the section immediately preceding, this part of the analysis deals with assessing the sub-group's improvement since eighth grade and progress toward high school completion.

In the chapter on enrollment and participation, it was reported that about two-fifths of the ninth graders receiving client management services had at least one risk factor such as attendance under 80% or failed math in eighth grade (See Figure 3.2). In addition, students in this group were more likely to attend after-school sessions than students not receiving PCM services. Almost 30% of the PCM ninth graders attended 45 or more sessions (See Figure 3.4). This section reports the outcomes for the 42 ninth graders who attended at least one after-school session *and* received PCM services; the six PCM students who never attended the program are excluded.

Fig. 4.11 School Attendance
9th-grade PCM participants

65.0%

35.0%

Attendance ≥ 80%
(26)

Attendance <80%
(14)

Source: School District of Philadelphia
N=40   Missing=2

As Figure 4.11 reveals, 65% of the PCM students had acceptable attendance, while 35% were chronically absent. Moreover, when comparing eighth and ninth grade data, we found that of the 9 PCM youth with attendance risk in eighth grade, (1) of them demonstrated improvement in ninth and left the attendance risk category.

Fig. 4.12 Math Performance
9th-grade PCM participants

62.2%

37.8%

Passed math
(23)

Failed math
(14)

Source: School District of Philadelphia
N=37   Missing=5

About 62% of the PCM participants passed math in ninth grade, and 38% failed (See Figure 4.12). While 3 PCM students failed math in eighth grade, 2 of them made progress in their first year of high school and passed.

Fig. 4.13 English Performance
9th-grade PCM participants

71.4%

28.6%

Passed English
(25)

Failed English
(10)

Source: School District of Philadelphia
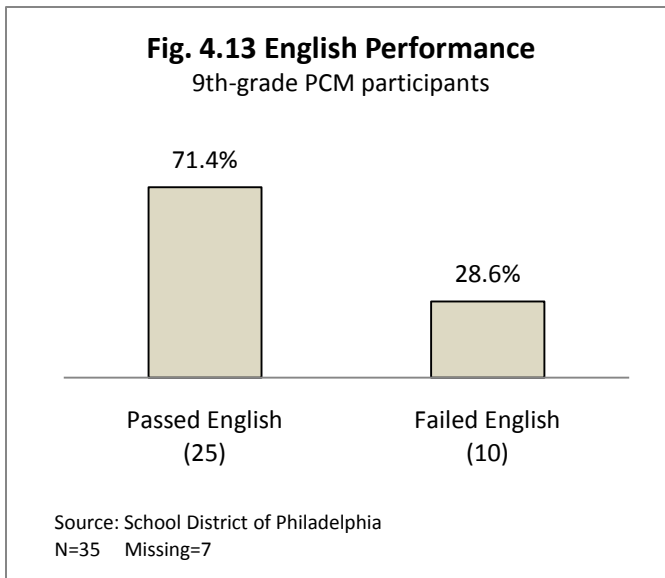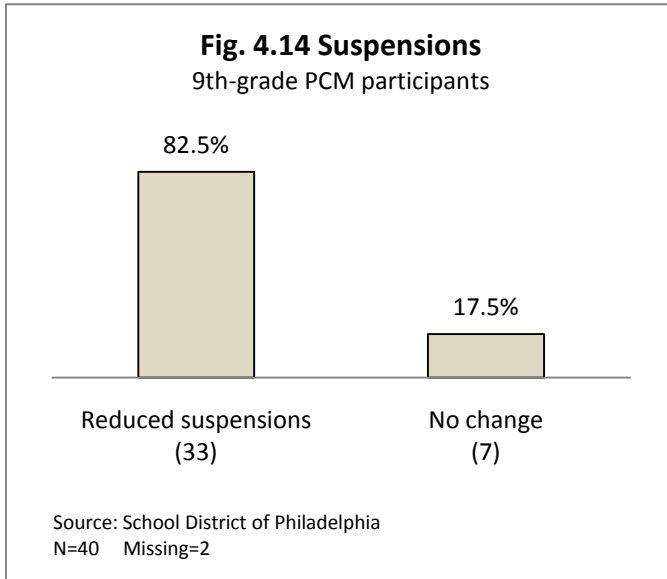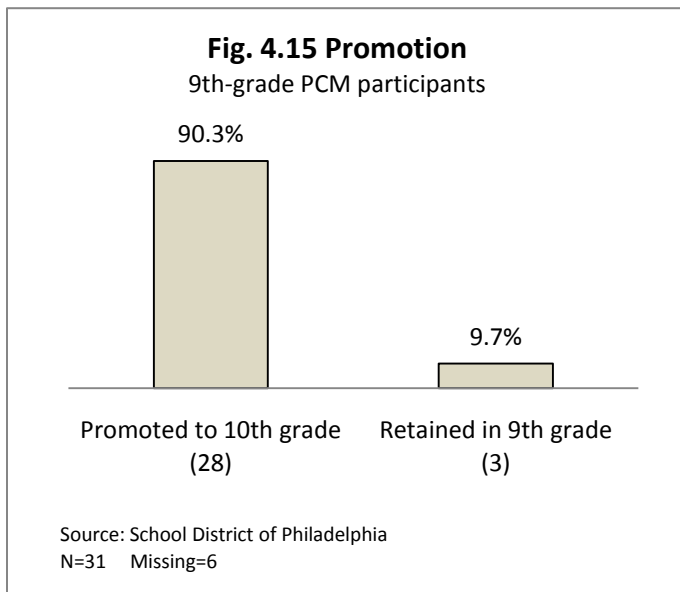N=35   Missing=7

Figure 4.13 provides clear evidence that this sub-group did particularly well in English. Greater than 70% of the youth passed English in ninth grade, and almost 30% failed. There were only 4 PCM students who performed poorly in this subject during eighth grade, and 1 of them was able to move out of this risk category.

Fig. 4.14 Suspensions
9th-grade PCM participants

82.5%

17.5%

Reduced suspensions	No change
(33)	(7)

Source: School District of Philadelphia
N=40   Missing=2

Comparing the rates of minimal and multiple suspensions for this group yields a hopeful finding. As Figure 4.14 shows, more than four-fifths (82.5%) of the PCM students completed the ninth grade without being suspended or with only one incident. Almost one-fifth (17.5%) exhibited repeatedly negative behavior, resulting in multiple suspensions. Of the 5 students who were suspended in eighth grade, 4 demonstrated improvement and moved out of this risk category in freshman year.

Fig. 4.15 Promotion
9th-grade PCM participants

90.3%

9.7%

Promoted to 10th grade	Retained in 9th grade
(28)	(3)

Source: School District of Philadelphia
N=31   Missing=6

Of the 31 PCM participants for which data are available, 28 of them (90.3%) were promoted to tenth grade (See Fig. 4.15).

Comparative Analysis

For the comparative analysis, we are interested in determining whether program participation was a significant factor predicting student outcomes at the end of ninth grade. The findings below result from multiple regression models for each outcome area using program participation as a predictor variable. Program participation was analyzed in two ways. One analysis modeled participation as participation in the after-school program as well as receipt of PCM services. In this analysis, students either were identified as having the full model or their participation was recorded as a zero. A second model was run for each outcome variable in which program participation was represented in the analysis by dosage— specifically, the amount of days a student attended the after-school Éxito program. Students who received additional PCM supports were not singled out in any way. Each analysis was run for each outcome variable.

This analysis compares first-time ninth graders who participated in Éxito with a group of first-time ninth graders who did not attend the program . The comparison group also includes students who enrolled in Éxito but never attended. The analysis controls for eighth-grade risk factors and demographic characteristics by entering these as the first step of the regression analysis.

The table below (Table 4.1) reports beta coefficient, β, for particular variables in the analysis. The beta coefficient is the amount by which the outcome variable changes when the explanatory variable changes by one unit (all other variables being held constant). Coefficients will be discussed in more detail in the sections that follow.

Attendance

Table 4.1 shows the results of the regression analysis predicting school attendance at the end of ninth grade. The results show that being a PCM student [i.e., having a client manager in addition to attending the after-school program] was a significant predictor of attendance at the end of ninth grade. School attendance for ninth-grade PCM students was greater than attendance for non-attenders and for other Éxito students who did not have PCMs. The coefficient below shows that students who had PCMS attended school an average of 7 additional days in ninth grade.

Attendance at the Éxito program (dosage) was also related to greater attendance in ninth grade although, not to the same extent as for the full model. Students who attended the Éxito program had higher attendance than other Edison ninth graders. However, their attendance was only 0.17 greater

than non-Éxito participants (when controlling for eighth-grade attendance). Therefore, with every five days of program attendance, school attendance increased by one day. The difference was statistically significant and going in the right direction, but still a small difference.

Table 4.1 Regression Results

Program Participation	Attendance	Math	English	Suspension
		Coefficients		
PCM + after-school program	7.06**	2.7	-2.35	-.31
Dosage (# of times attending after-school program)	.17**	.06*	-.03	-.00

*p=<.05, **p= <.01
Data Source: School District of Philadelphia

Math Grades

Table 4.1 also shows the results of the regression analysis predicting math grades at the end of ninth grade. Being a PCM student was not a significant predictor of higher math grades at the end of ninth grade. The coefficient shows that math grades for ninth-grade PCM students were 2.7 points higher than math grades for non-attenders and for other Éxito students who did not have PCMs and this was not a statistically significant difference. In addition, an the analysis based on using math as a dichotomous variable—pass/fail—did not reveal statistical significance. Thus PCM students neither had higher math grades nor passed at higher rates than other Exito and non-Exito students.

However, frequent participation in the after-school program was significantly related to higher math grades. The degree of impact was relatively small. For each additional day of program attendance, Éxito participants' math grades increased by 0.06 percentage points, relative to non-Éxito peers. Therefore, 20 days of program attendance would be required to see a one (1) percentage point increase in a student's math grade.

English Grades

As Table 4.1 reveals, neither the partial program model (after-school program) nor the full program model (after-school program with PCM) was related to improved English grades in ninth grade. In fact, English grades for Éxito participants were lower than English grades for other students. However, these differences were not statistically significant and therefore, do not reflect any negative impact of Éxito for English grades.

Similarly, Table 4.1 reveals that neither the full nor partial program model had an effect with regard to suspensions. Both coefficients were very small and not statistically significant.

Conclusion

The student outcomes reported in this chapter are based on attendance, behavior and academic achievement indicators for first-time ninth graders who participated in the Éxito program during 2008-09. Because rates of attendance, suspension and promotion correlate strongly with chances of completing high school, measuring and analyzing participant outcomes helps to determine whether or not the Éxito program is moving toward fulfilling its goal of increasing the number of students who graduate from Edison High School. While the program is in an early stage of development, student outcomes reveal some encouraging findings particularly for students who experienced the full program model.

From the comparative analysis, we saw evidence that Éxito students—particularly students receiving client management services in addition to the after-school program—were doing better than other Edison ninth graders in their school attendance. They attended school, on average, 9 more days than other Edison ninth graders. Smaller, but statistically significant, impacts were seen for students who received only the after-school program. These students had slightly better attendance and slightly higher math grades than other Edison students. While the impact from the after-school program alone was small, it was an encouraging sign for the first year of the Exito program. These findings are encouraging and suggest that Exito's full model can have an impact on reducing the dropout and truancy rates at Edison High School. However, the challenge for Éxito will be ensuring that all program participants have access to the full model as the resources for client management services have been limited in the past. In addition, Exito will need to increase participation and retention rates among its after-school participants.

Students who most at-risk, meeting the original risk criteria also made greater progress in 9th grade than similar 9th grade students. While the students who originally met the "at-risk" criteria still struggled to reduce chronic absences, a higher percentage of these at-risk Exito students (3/15) reduced their absences compared to a similar group of 9th graders not participating in Exito. In addition, the most at-

risk Exito students passed math at a higher rate than other Edison ninth grade students who also entered 9th grade with failing math grades.

Results for the entire sample indicate that while a majority of the program participants are progressing toward high school graduation, a sizable group (a third or more) are struggling in each outcome area and will need additional supports in 2009-2010 school year. It will be important to continue following the current cohort and additional cohorts to understand whether or not the program continues to make a difference in improving student outcomes and ultimately reducing the dropout rate.

Points for Discussion

- Staff should consider how to extend the full program model, including client management, to all students. Client management services only reached about a third of the Éxito group in the first year and could benefit more participants.

- The after-school program appears to have the potential to impact attendance and math grades. The degree of influence could be strengthened if the program continues to refine its intervention strategies for these particular outcomes. The chapters that follow address implementation issues that may help to strengthen the after-school program model. In particular, Éxito should consider its theory of action regarding supports for students with behavior challenges.

- English grades were not impacted by either the full or partial program model. Findings from the implementation research may offer some insights into reasons for this lack of impact. Nonetheless, impacting adolescent literacy is a challenging task. Supports for adolescent literacy have become a recent topic of interest among educators and funders. Éxito may consider tapping into some of the new research and resources available in this area.

Chapter V
After-School Program Design and Implementation

"[Éxito tutoring] is a time where you can sit and you can have one-on-one. So he teaches you the right way." (student describing the Éxito tutoring component)

"I just get excited to go to school sometimes…for dance." (student participating in the Éxito dance class)

"Yeah, some people it was their first year here, and they didn't really know a lot of people and this program helped them to become friends with other people." (Éxito participant)

The quotes above illustrate the ways in which the after-school program may have worked to improve student outcomes as described in the previous chapter. Staff and students noted that Éxito tutoring provided students with more individual attention, the opportunity to complete school work more consistently, to develop relationships with teachers and develop the trust and self-confidence needed to ask for help. Enjoyment of enrichment activities made some students more excited about coming to school, and students and staff reported that both tutoring and enrichment activities enabled students to develop positive relationships with their peers, an outcome that is important for developing ninth grade students' sense of belonging in school. Developing friendships was even more important for English language learner (ELL) participants of Éxito who may have been new to both the school and the country. Staff and students also pointed out that the Éxito program was a safe haven, a space in which participants were able to spend their after-school hours away from negative influences possibly encountered outside of school.

While the Éxito after-school program provided potentially important supports to ninth-grade students, assistance that was not found elsewhere in the school, expanding the after-school program to meet the needs of 140 students proved challenging in this first full year of implementation. While some students clearly benefitted, both qualitative and student outcome data suggest that these benefits did not reach all active enrollees in all outcome areas. Refinements to the program that help to increase student attendance and clarify the academic and behavioral supports, may increase the extent of the impact that the after-school program alone can have. To their credit, Éxito staff made several important mid-course corrections to adjust to the challenges encountered in the first year. This chapter addresses several key issues that arose during implementation of the after-school program.

- The chapter begins with a discussion of the <u>strengths of the program's tutoring component</u>. This section highlights the tutoring program's ability to provide individual homework support to some students and the caring relationships that developed between some tutors and students.
- Next, we describe <u>challenges</u> concerning rigor, student engagement, and classroom management, which surfaced during tutoring sessions. We discuss factors that made it difficult for the tutoring activities to be implemented more effectively. We focus particularly on tutoring because, while the enrichment component of the program provided a valuable support for students, tutoring was the feature that was most closely aligned with the desired outcome of academic success.
- The chapter concludes with a description of strengths and challenges of implementing the <u>enrichment activities</u>.

Tutoring is an important support for ninth-grade students who struggle with the academic demands associated with the transition to high school. One significant academic hurdle encountered by ninth grade students is Algebra 1. Ninth-grade algebra is often a gatekeeper to students progressing in high school because math courses, unlike literacy classes, are offered in a linear sequence. Students who do not pass algebra in their freshman year cannot advance through the high school math sequence. At the same time, literacy skills cannot be ignored as reading content intensifies in high school and content area teachers are often not trained to support struggling adolescent readers.[41]

To assess the quality of tutoring activities, RFA developed a rubric to be used in classroom observations that was based on the best practices for tutoring, which were described earlier. In addition, we added dimensions to the rubric reflecting best practices from research literature on youth development programs for adolescents. These included positive teacher-student relationships, well-developed and consistent strategies for classroom management, student voice in the activities, sufficient rigor to achieve the academic gains, individual support and effectiveness of instruction and evidence of student engagement. In using the rubric, RFA researchers observed tutoring sessions with regard to both

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[41] Brown, D., Reumann-Moore, R. J., Christman, J. B., Maluk, H. P., Liu, R., & du Plessis, P. (2007). *Much More Prepared This Year: Front Line Educators Assess PAHSCI Progress.* Philadelphia: Research for Action.

positive and negative practices and rated each session as high, medium, or low on each quality dimension.[42]

Strengths of Tutoring Activities

All tutoring sessions received high ratings in some areas. In particular, tutoring sessions frequently ranked high on clear and effective communication of instructions and information to students, as well as providing adequate individual support to students. Participants who commented positively about tutoring pointed to the individual support and help they were able to receive in tutoring. The one-on-one approach was observed quite frequently. However, it was most effective when the tutor had a small class of three to five students. When classes were larger, students who did not have the tutor's individual attention were often distracted until the adult worked with them.

Tutoring participants also had positive comments about their relationships with most tutors, consistently describing them as caring. In response to being asked to describe what tutors did to show the youth they cared, students pointed to tutors taking time to explain material and explaining it well, making sure to interact with students and give them individual attention. In addition, participants appreciated when instructors could put them at ease so that they felt comfortable asking for help. The youth also appreciated tutors who were able to make learning fun by using games.

In addition, Éxito staff and tutors implemented several best practices when implementing the tutoring activities. First, they reported close coordination with classroom teachers so that tutoring sessions were aligned with classroom lessons. Aligning literacy activities with classroom content has been found to be important to the skill development of struggling readers.[43] In addition, Éxito staff monitored student progress by looking at student report cards and attendance data each quarter.

Challenges of the First Year

While some students received help in tutoring and were able to develop positive relationships with tutors, challenges documented in RFA's observations may have prevented a larger number of participants from experiencing the benefits of the sessions. In particular, we observed that tutors

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[42] Note: The ratings on this rubric are not yet standardized as the rubric is still under development.

[43] Carnegie Council on Advancing Literacy (2010). Time to act: An agenda for advancing adolescent literacy for college and career success. Retrieved from http://www.carnegie.org/literacy/tta/pdf/tta_Main.pdf.

struggled to offer the type of "out of the box" tutoring activities Éxito staff envisioned that would be both engaging and meet the remedial needs of students. Perhaps because of this difficulty, tutoring sessions often displayed difficult classroom dynamics in which many students were not focused on tutoring activities.

The Challenge of Engaging Students in "Out of the Box" Remedial Activities

When Éxito staff envisioned tutoring activities, they hoped it would address students' remedial needs and be "*an opportunity to step outside that box and meet the student where they are at as opposed to where the curriculum tells you need to be. So, creativity and innovative teaching.*" Therefore, tutoring would both address students' academic needs and be appealing. Often, however, the activities did not meet Éxito's vision. Furthermore, sessions ranged in ability to address students' academic deficiencies as well as to interest students. Some activities were more challenging—such as algebra worksheets—but not engaging. Other activities—such as watching YouTube videos to discuss literacy concepts like tone and character—were captivating, but observations of these segments suggested that students' desire to watch videos may, at times, have overtaken the academic focus of the lessons. However, as the student outcomes analysis confirmed, math tutors and tutoring sessions were observed to be somewhat stronger than English tutoring sessions.

Homework completion was a major focus of most of the tutoring sessions, and observations suggested that students concentrated on doing their homework when the tutoring group was small (1-5 students). Often, students did not have homework or did not bring it to tutoring. Some tutors had a backup plan for students who did not have homework. For example, one tutor stated that if students had no homework, he would pull problems from their current year or next year's text book and ask students to try them. However, in other instances, when students had no homework, observations and student comments suggested their tutoring time was less productive. Some students expressed their lack of engagement in tutoring sessions by describing them as "boring."

In addition, engagement was connected to the level of caring students perceived from the tutor. While most tutors were perceived as caring, a few were not. For example, participants commented about one tutor who did not attend the program regularly and did not always pay attention to students when she was in the room. They also noticed when tutors did not take the time to help students with their homework. Not surprisingly, students that had instructors that were not perceived as caring and/or were frequently absent were less enthusiastic about the tutoring program.

Tutors and staff discussed multiple factors affecting the type of tutoring activities they were able to offer to students. In retrospect, staff felt that they needed more time to clarify the vision for tutoring. One staff member described the academic component as having an "identity crisis." As the newest component of the after-school program (the entrepreneurship program was offered in the previous iteration of Exito), it may have needed more development than staff were able to provide with their energies going to recruitment efforts.

As tutoring began to be implemented, questions arose among staff about whether tutors should focus their efforts on homework or on other activities. Staff also questioned if tutors should lead group activities or provide one-on-one tutoring. In addition, most tutors did not intend to focus on remedial activities but aimed instead to help students pass their current classes. As one tutor expressed, *"I want to work with what they're working on right now. The math curriculum moves so fast that they need to."* This same teacher pointed out that helping students pass their classes is not the same as remediation:

> You don't know how to multiply, I don't want to say it's too late but I'm sorry. We learned that already. You've got to be doing this. Use the calculator. I mean, we can spend time teaching them how to multiply but they are going to fail the class because that's not what they are graded on. So the whole system is a mess to be honest.

In addition, the idea of remediating students was not consistent with the philosophy of the School District. Another teacher commented:

> In the SDP you're told that you have to stick to the core curriculum; you can't go back to basics…That's why they are allowed to use calculators. A lot of them don't know multiplication tables, can't count money, stuff they should know by now. We just keep moving them forward—teaching algebra, geometry.

Thus, Éxito's goals of remediation may not have been supported by the prevailing philosophy of the District, and tutors therefore chose to focus on homework help or current topics instead of helping students address gaps in their learning.

In addition, as described above, the tutors were facing an uphill battle in trying to implement tutoring after a long school day. Both tutors and students were generally tired upon entering the sessions, which began immediately after school with very little to mark the difference between the end of the school and the beginning of the program. A comment frequently heard from active participants and students we spoke to in focus groups who had left the program was that it was too much like school. As one student said, "*It's like extra school, after school.*" Another stated, *"Nobody wants to go from school to more school."* A teacher similarly stated: *"…After these kids have been in school all day, they're not going*

to sit in a class and be taught something, even if they need help. It's almost like a punishment, like an extended day of class….In my mind it's like, 'I can't teach another lesson. These kids are going to eat us alive!'"

The difficulty of engaging ninth graders after school may have been heightened by their adjustment to high school. One student pointed out that they no longer had recess during the school day as they did in middle school and were adjusting to a fuller academic load, *"We go like 8 classes with no room for breaks."*

Nonetheless, many students reported signing up for Éxito because they wanted help in improving their grades and, as reported above, students with smaller group tutoring (3-4/tutor) seemed to appreciate the extra help after school. It may be that tutoring class sizes grew too large for students to receive individual attention, causing them to disengage.

The combination then, of a longer school day and the frequent inability to get individual attention in tutoring meant that students who attended the program experienced difficulty concentrating on their academic work. Tutors discussed several other obstacles to tutoring students. They discussed challenges associated with the changing schedule. While it was important for Éxito to make mid-course corrections, some tutors felt that the way in which changes occurred disrupted their relationship-building and planning. One tutor explained:

> The biggest problem I had was that it was kind of disorganized for a while, and they kind of moved the kids around from class to class for a while. That's what made it hard to plan because we didn't know who was going to be there from one week to the next.

An additional setback was student and tutor absenteeism. As chapter three described, many students were inconsistent participants, making it difficult for tutors to plan. In addition, instructors themselves began to miss tutoring sessions, creating more challenges for other tutors when sections had to be merged.

Classroom Management

When students were not engaged in tutoring sessions, classroom management became a problem. Classroom management was consistently rated low in tutoring sessions that were observed. In many classes, instructors struggled to keep all students focused on class activities and in some instances, tutors found themselves in power struggles with students. The following vignette illustrates some of the typical classroom management struggles encountered by tutors:

It's very noisy in the room, with a cluster of students in the front chatting, phones ringing intermittently, etc. After hearing a few curse words in the milieu, the instructor says "Watch your language," and a male student in the front says in response, "You [expletive] happy now?" The instructor looks at him disapprovingly but says nothing.… She moves on to math problems, which seem to be her focus. Today she has a combined class of students since another teacher was absent today. She writes factoring problems on the board and some of the students participate in only a half-serious way…One student wants her to explain why his answer is wrong and sassily tells everyone to shut up so that he can hear…Soon after, he goes up to the chalkboard and demands the chalk from the instructor. She refuses and tells him to sit down. He poses for the class, saying loudly, "This is not a TV show, Miss. I told you to give me the chalk. I want to speak to your manager!" Students laugh.

Students also commented on unproductive classroom dynamics. One student who was no longer attending the program commented on this issue saying, "*The kids in here, they are too loud, and they don't focus. They don't pay attention.*"

In many respects, classroom management challenges were linked to the lack of student engagement described in the preceding section. In addition, a handful of students had been referred to the program because of problematic behavior. As mentioned in the chapter three, twenty seven participants had multiple suspensions during the year. Client management was one support for these students; however, only eight students with 8th grade behavioral challenges were able to receive client management services. Éxito had not developed an intervention strategy within the after-school program to support students who had behavior issues.

Furthermore, Éxito staff and tutors did not have similar expectations regarding classroom management strategies. Inconsistencies existed between the expectations expressed by Éxito staff and those expressed by tutors regarding how to handle students' leaving the classroom or leaving the program early, cursing or wearing hats in the classroom. Éxito staff were also concerned with at least one instructor's yelling to handle a problem with students.

Adding to the challenges, Éxito coordinators themselves had differing views on classroom management. The enrichment coordinator described his perspective as having a "specific and thoughtful disciplinary system." The academic coordinator, on the other hand, described her position as coming from a "relationship standpoint." She perceived the disciplinary system of the enrichment coordinator as too rigid, explaining that, *"I'm not rigid on protocols. If you are too rigid, you lose them. The rigidness of the approach was not working with these students."* She believed that the program had to focus on retaining students in the program. Both perspectives had merit—it was important for Éxito to have a consistent system of incentives and consequences which encouraged students to modify their behavior

so that tutoring sessions could be productive but kept students engaged in the program so they could continue to receive support. Differing views on classroom management among Éxito staff and between staff and tutors likely contributed to the difficulties with classroom management observed in tutoring sessions.

Tutors offered some suggestions to improve classroom management. These included developing a stronger in-house rewards system. This suggestion fits with research on tutoring best practices, which call for ongoing recognition of student progress. While Éxito offered several opportunities for students to go on field trips, instructors felt it would be helpful to offer more immediate rewards for students whose parents would not let them attend trips. One tutor also suggested having an on-site guidance counselor or client manager to help address socio-emotional challenges that arise during the sessions.

The class that served English language learners (ELLs) was the one exception to the problem with classroom management. Both RFA observations and comments from the ninth grade ELL instructor confirmed that this class tended to be more engaged and focused on the daily activities of the tutoring component. The ELL instructor reported, "*In the tutoring it's a very calm setting…there are no behavior problems. Everyone that's there wants to be there*."

In general, lack of student engagement and a handful of challenging students made it difficult for tutoring classrooms to maintain their academic focus. At the same time, tutoring activities allowed some students to receive individual attention and develop supportive relationships with their teachers which, as the previous chapter reported, led to improvements in grades of some students.

Enrichment Activities

While RFA's research did not focus as intensely on the enrichment activities, observations and student comments point to higher levels of student engagement and better classroom dynamics in this setting— despite encountering some of the same challenges that tutors described above. The following vignette provides a glimpse into one entrepreneurship class:

> The atmosphere in the entrepreneurship class is relaxed and calm. The instructor seems to have good rapport with the students, smiles frequently and only gently scolds them. The students (four boys and three girls) are at various stages of working on posters about themselves. Some are writing on loose-leaf paper; others are writing onto large poster board; a few are illustrating nearly finished posters with stencils. The girls are mostly working quietly while the boys chat (also quietly) in the back. The boys do not seem to be as engaged in the poster-making. The instructor reminds those at the beginning stages that the prompts they are to use for their

writing are thoughts about racism, goals for the future, and experiences that they have had. One
boy in the front who is writing on loose leaf says that his goals are to learn more English,
become a professional, and be a pilot. One girl says that she wants to be a veterinarian.

Enrichment classrooms were often larger and, as the vignette above suggests, more focused and productive than tutoring classes. Enrichments sessions offered environments in which students learned new skills or discussed important issues with their instructors.

One factor that may have helped to make enrichment activities more appealing to students was that a choice of activities was offered. Students commented on enjoying the choice they were given although a few students did not feel they had a choice. At the same time, participants suggested enrichment activities that they would like to see offered next year including voice or instrumental lessons, technology related activities and culinary arts.

The enrichment program also encountered several challenges. The program went through three dance instructors and, not surprisingly, students were somewhat critical of this turnover. In addition, the program did not have convenient access to or adequate space for some of the activities. For example, the spring fitness class took place at a local gym, and the dance class occurred in a regular classroom with desks pushed to the side.

Another challenge was meeting the needs of the ELL students. While they had a separate section for tutoring and entrepreneurship, they were mixed in with English-speaking students and instructors for other enrichment activities. These classes were held in English, although enrichment instructors translated some information into Spanish. ELL students asked that there be more bilingual instructors next year. In a focus group they reported harassment from some English-speaking students in the enrichment activities, including name-calling and insults for being new to the country. One student commented, "*They act like they know more than you do just because they speak English*." Consequently, ELL students asked that next year, they have separate enrichment activities.

Enrichment offered students an opportunity to choose a non- "school-like" activity that they enjoyed and students experienced more focused yet relaxed learning environments.

Conclusion

Éxito made progress in incorporating several best practices into the tutoring program. However, tutors and Éxito staff faced major hurdles in the first year that made it difficult for the tutoring component to

be "ramped up" to the level at which it could meet the needs of a large number of students. Enrichment appeared to be more successful at engaging students than tutoring. As Éxito continues to develop, it will have to continue wrestling with the dilemma of providing effective academic supports that appeal to students.

Points for Discussion

At the time of this report, Éxito was developing plans to revise the after-school program for the coming year. For year two, instead of offering separate enrichment and tutoring activities, they plan to offer project-based learning that integrates the motivational hook of relevant, career-oriented themes with work that requires students to develop academic skills. Several issues emerge from this year's research that could inform the Éxito team as it works to further develop the after-school component of the program:

- A clearer vision and theory of action for academic activities may benefit the program. For example, it may be helpful for year two to articulate how project-based learning activities align with the academic outcomes that will be examined in the evaluation. The theory of action should also incorporate the needs and goals of ELL students.

- Students come to Éxito after a long school day, yet they arrive with academic needs that must be addressed if they are to graduate from high school. Éxito should consider the type of activities that offer an appropriate level of academic challenge but are also engaging and relevant. Project-based learning activities seem to be a step in the right direction.

- Students were more engaged to do academic work when they were in small groups and able to have individual attention from a tutor. The program may want to consider offering individual tutoring as an option when students need it.

- In response to concerns that Éxito is too much like school, the program may consider having an opening gathering at the beginning of the after-school program where all students are together and announcements or an opening ritual takes place to create a distinction between school and the Éxito program.

- Tutors suggested offering more immediate incentives to recognize student attendance, academic progress, etc. This suggestion aligns with tutoring best practices research, which points to the importance of frequent recognition of student progress. Food may be an effective incentive to reward students.

- ELL students requested separate classes and bilingual instructors. Éxito should consider whether these strategies fit into their theory of action and vision for ELL students or if there are other ways they might address the concerns of ELL students.

- Éxito staff should consider developing a clear and consistent code of conduct that balances the need for students to abide by particular rules while also not alienating those who most need the program. A code of conduct and system of incentives and consequences could be incorporated into an orientation for Éxito direct service providers. In addition, they should consider developing strategies, in addition to client management, that could be used during the after-school program to support students who have chronic behavioral issues.

- Another issue for staff to consider is how much discretion the program model should allow instructors in determining the structure and content of their own sessions. What defines the Éxito's project-based learning activities; what experiences should all Éxito participants have? Efforts to standardize curriculum and instructional procedures may benefit the quality of instruction and subsequently add value to students' experiences during project-based learning sessions.

Chapter VI
Éxito's Primary Client Management Component

Thanks to her, I'm doing what I gotta do. (PCM student)

As described in Chapter 2, the integration of the Primary Client Management (PCM) model with afterschool activities in the Éxito program was new in the 2008-09 school year. Client management could carry with it a stigma, but in the Éxito program, it appears that PCM services were well-received by students. Staff were thoughtful in how they described th**e** PCM component of the program so as not to deter potential clients. In presentations, they said the PCMs would provide "mentoring" and might help "*for college or help if you have trouble with your landlord.*" By the end of the year, student outcomes, program attendance, and focus group data suggest that the PCM component was a marked strength of the Éxito program. This chapter will examine the PCM component of Éxito in the following sections:

- The chapter begins with a discussion of <u>overall responses</u> to client management services from the perspective of various stakeholders.
- This is followed by a description of the PCM process and strategies that were <u>strengths</u>.
- A final section describes several <u>challenges</u> encountered in the first year of the PCM model.

Overall Response to the PCM Component

The PCM component was considered a great success by many stakeholders, including staff from both divisions, students and tutors. Several PCM students reported improved motivation, attendance, and school performance, and believed that their client manager (or PCM) had helped them overcome one or more problems. Staff members credited PCMs with creating relationships and providing one-on-one attention for students. Several students reported attending the after-school program because the PCM asked them to attend. As discussed in Chapter 3, PCM students were more likely than other Éxito enrollees to attend after-school activities, suggesting that their relationship with a client manager may have encouraged a higher level of engagement with the Éxito program. Also, perhaps as a result of their participation in both the after-school and PCM components of Éxito's holistic program design, PCM students had higher school attendance in their ninth grade year when compared to other Edison students, as discussed in Chapter 4. Teachers also shared success stories of students who had made marked improvements after working with a PCM. One tutor shared this striking example:

> I have a kid who's in my regular class and he comes to my tutoring class, and in the beginning of the year he wasn't doing anything. He got an F in the first marking period. He didn't care. But he

had a case worker and we were on him and talking to him all the time and the case worker was meeting with us and meeting with him and the second marking period he got an A. He's smart, he just wasn't motivated in the beginning. He got that motivation...In the very beginning of the year before the program even started he was having some issues with his mother...I think their relationship has gotten better and I think the client manager is part of it because especially with this kid she was up here all the time talking to him and talking to the teachers. (Éxito tutor)

As is evident in this anecdote, client managers faced the challenging task of motivating students with serious personal issues to change their behaviors in and out of school for the better. While not all of the PCM students made dramatic turnarounds, all of the PCM students we interviewed reported some benefit that they found in their case management relationship. The students also said they felt that the PCMs cared about them and were there to help them. Many also spoke about the supportive relationships that PCMs had formed with their mothers. The following section describes the processes and strategies that contributed to the overall success of the PCM component.

Strengths of the PCM Component

Although the content of students' sessions with their PCMs were individualized, interviews with students and client managers suggest that core elements of the PCM component were used with many or all clients. We discuss here several strategies that appeared to be strengths of the PCM approach: trust-building, goal-setting and accountability, mediation, referrals, and other PCM roles.

Building trust

PCMs pointed to the relationships that they built with their students as a crucial part of the case management process. One PCM explained that the case management filled a fundamental need for many of the students. "*They don't have someone that they can count on so I want to give them that person—that I'm there, they can trust me, I can give them whatever they need and in most cases they just need someone to talk to*" (Client Manager). Achieving the level of trust at which a student was willing to open up and discuss personal issues as well as follow an adult's advice, however, was not easy. Both PCMs we interviewed discussed the challenge of gaining students' trust at the beginning of a client management relationship. Before the relationship was established, it was a challenge to get students to cooperate. One explained,

> They are at a very difficult age right now and it's very hard for them to trust someone, or sometimes to even get anything out of them...they're just not very compliant. They have a lot of trust issues. Therefore they don't really trust me at the beginning. (Client Manager)

Students also talked about this early period in which having a client manager was awkward for them. One said, "*At first I felt weird because I didn't know her and I never had a person come to the house or visiting my school and seeing how I'm doing*." This awkwardness did not last throughout the period of client management, however. All of the PCM students we interviewed said that they now trusted their client managers and felt comfortable talking with them about their problems.

The fact that many of these students modified negative behaviors in sometimes dramatic ways and were willing to comply with schedules and daily reports requested by their client managers attests to the strong relationships they had formed with them. Client managers identified confidentiality and consistency as necessary elements in the client manager-student relationship. A student who was chronically truant from school also said that the persistence of the PCM in reaching out to him was crucial. One PCM explained a few of the ways in which she was able to establish bonds with her clients.

> One way to develop trust especially with the girls is if they tell you something in confidence, not to go back and tell the parents. Usually the student will be able to tell if the client manager talked to the parent because the parent will bring it up eventually. So my one client told me something in confidence and a few days later I asked her how everything was and she said, 'I trust you because you didn't tell my mom what I told you.' Another way to develop the trust is to be there. When you say you'll be there in two weeks, don't show up in a month. I have a lot of parents who tell me that the client manager showed up once and never again until the date of court. So to just be consistent, and whatever promises you make to keep them and if you're unable to, just to call them up and let them know that you can't so that way they don't sit there all day waiting for you. (Client Manager)

In sum, client managers needed patience to persevere with uncooperative students, keen judgment about what information could or should be kept confidential from parents and organizational skills to juggle meetings with multiple clients, as well as the wherewithal to be consistent with home visits, even when families did not always keep their appointments.

Goal-setting and Accountability

In order for client managers to be successful, they also need a set of skills, and strategies with which to motivate troubled youth to overcome challenging circumstances. A common strategy that the PCMs used for this purpose was goal setting. With the help of their PCMs, students decided on behavioral changes that would help alleviate their most pressing problems. One PCM described the goal-setting process.

> I usually ask them what they feel is their main issue going on, and then they'll explain it and then from there, I say, 'How can we go from here to where we need to get? Give me three steps.' If

it's truancy they might say, 'Wake up on time, go to bed the night before, prepare the clothes the night before, arrive to school on time every day.' If it's a grade issue, 'attend class, completing and submitting work', because sometimes they do it but don't submit it and don't get graded for it. (Client Manager)

PCMs then set up structures to help students meet these goals. These included schedules for students to follow or daily reports that teachers completed on students' individual class attendance and behavior. One student gave an example.

> One time me and my mom had an argument about me going outside and being on the phone at a certain time and [my PCM] helped a lot with that part because she made me write a paper and sign my name and give me a schedule of what time I should use the computer, what time should I use the phone, what time should I be outside. I followed the schedule and it went pretty good. (PCM Student)

PCMs then set up reward systems and accountability structures to help students meet these goals. In one case, a PCM told a student who liked to graffiti that if met his goals, she would give him a "black book," a hard-bound drawing book with blank pages where he could express himself.

Arbitration and Mediation

Apart from setting goals with students and monitoring their progress, PCMs also acted as arbiters between students and parents or teachers. One student explained that her PCM checked in on her situation at home and helped her and her mother resolve disputes. PCMs also met with teachers at Edison to find out what schoolwork students needed to make up, and to act as mediator when relationships between students and teachers were strained. One student explained that the meetings his PCM arranged with his teachers helped him do better in school. Another student said she liked it that her PCM talked to her teachers when there was a problem because "*she finds out the truth*" (PCM student).

Referrals and Other Roles

In addition to helping students meet goals and mediate disputes, PCMs also filled other roles. They contacted students who were not regularly attending the after-school program. They translated for Spanish-speaking parents, and referred students and parents to services inside and outside of Congreso, including mentoring programs, ESL classes, psychological counseling, parenting classes and adult education programs. In some cases, the help that PCMs provided for parents was the primary way in which their clients benefited from the program. One student from Puerto Rico who was having a difficult time adjusting to life in Philadelphia and at Edison admitted that he continued to frequently cut classes

despite the best efforts of his PCM and other adults in the Éxito program. Still, he was positive about his client manager and grateful for her support. "*She has interpreted for my mother,*" he said, "*Since mom doesn't know English either, she helps her, or she gives her advice like, 'look at this place' or other things, she helps her find connections.*" (PCM Student, translated from Spanish)

Challenges

While most parties spoke positively about the PCM program component and its implementation, PCMs and others identified areas in which changes could improve the experience of the client managers and their clients. These included issues related to funding, time management, and leadership around the staffing plan.

Funding

A major issue identified by the PCM supervisor was the funding structure, which constrained his client managers to work with clients for only three months—an issue that was resolved in late winter. Typically they found that they needed more time with clients in order to see positive changes. In some cases, it was funding guidelines rather than client need that determined the length of PCMs' relationships with students. If a PCM logged fewer visits, they would not receive payment at all, and if they made additional visits these would not be paid for by DHS, regardless of client need. Moreover, the successes of the PCM relationships with clients suggested that the service should be extended to more students, but lack of funds prevented the hiring of additional PCMs.

Time

The PCMs also mentioned challenges related to time management and bureaucratic requirements. Maintaining the PCM records, which involved inputting identical notes on their interactions with clients into three separate databases, was a redundant and time consuming task. One PCM said that it took her a full day to input the "*handful of clients done in one week*." She also mentioned that the inputting of notes was a source of frustration for some PCMs in other Congreso programs and that some were more successful with their data entry than others. That said, the PCM supervisor reported that among all the Congreso PCMs he supervised, the Éxito PCMs were the most diligent with database maintenance.
The weekly meetings for the Éxito program may have also restricted the time that PCMs were able to work with clients. PCM issues were often not addressed until the end of the lengthy weekly meetings, and some PCMs did not feel like the content of the meetings was directly relevant to their client management work. The PCM supervisor, on the other hand, reported that the meetings were useful for him, as he was able to give and receive feedback on different program components.

Conclusion

Overall, the PCM component was a clear strength of the Éxito program, despite funding limitations and duplicated record-keeping requirements. While Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrated positive outcomes for PCM students in their program attendance and school attendance, this chapter explored the processes and strategies that contributed to this success. PCMs developed trusting relationships with their clients, built on confidentiality, consistency, and persistence. They supported students in setting and planning for goals, monitored their progress, and rewarded their achievement. PCMs also helped students and their families address issues inside and outside school by mediating conflicts, translating between Spanish and English, and providing referrals. The overall success of the PCM component in encouraging student engagement in both school and Éxito activities suggests that extending PCM services to more Éxito students might lead to their greater engagement and academic improvement as well.

Points for Discussion

- Client managers' emphasis on relationship-building and goal-setting seemed important to students' success. As discussed in Chapters 3, students who did not receive PCM services were not as likely to stay engaged in the Éxito program. Staff may want to consider how this component of the Éxito program could be extended to more students, even if this would mean enrolling fewer Éxito students overall.

- Mid-year, the Éxito program addressed the need to extend the PCM period, which had initially been limited to three months. With extended service periods, however, program leadership will need to be aware of the potential for increasingly heavy PCM caseloads.

- To reduce the amount of time PCMs spend inputting their notes into three different databases, Congreso should consider what it would require to streamline agency databases.

Chapter VII
Éxito Collaborations

Two collaborations—one internal and one external—laid the foundation for the Éxito program. Internally, staff from the Children and Youth Services (CYS) division, the one responsible for the after-school program, collaborated with the Neighborhood and Family Development (NFD) division, which provided client management services. Staff from both of these departments formed the Éxito team. Externally, Éxito staff had to work in close collaboration with Thomas A. Edison High School.

Research on collaboration suggests that successful alliances require an investment of time, effort, and energy to establish trust through a working system of communication. In addition, collaborations go through phases in which partners learn to align their work and give up some autonomy. It is natural for conflict to arise as integration of services and personal involvement increase, but in order for the partnership to be successful these conflicts must be addressed.[44] Overcoming these obstacles enables a productive working team to emerge. Alliances between schools and community organizations can be particularly difficult to establish because schools and community organizations can perceive each other as having different goals, and building consensus and trust therefore becomes challenging. In addition, community organizations often struggle to gain access to the types of multi-purpose spaces they need in schools and encounter tensions that surface when sharing classroom space with teachers.[45]

Over the course of the 2008-09 school year, significant progress was made in creating a productive Éxito team that integrated CYS and NFD staff. In addition, the partnership with Edison High School navigated the typical pitfalls that can undermine community agency-school relationships. As the literature suggests, team members did so by devoting a significant amount of time to communication efforts—through both Éxito team meetings and meetings with Edison High School's administration. Although these collaborations faced predictable challenges, impact on the implementation of Éxito was minimal. This chapter examines the successes and challenges related to collaboration that emerged in the implementation of the Éxito program model:

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[44] Gajda, R. (2004).
[45] Walker, K.E. & Arbreton, A.J.A. (2001); Walker, K.E. et al. (2000).

- The <u>strengths of the NFD-CYS collaboration</u> and factors that contributed to the partnership's success
- <u>Strains</u> on the NFD-CYS collaboration
- The <u>strengths in the Éxito-Edison partnership</u> and factors that contributed to the successful collaboration
- <u>Challenges</u> in the Éxito-Edison collaboration that emerged at the ground level

Strengths of CYS-NFD Interdepartmental Collaboration

Given the quantity and complexity of the interpersonal teamwork that was required for the realization of the Éxito model, program staff accomplished a great deal during the first full year. The Congreso branches worked together to design and implement the application process for Éxito students, develop and carry out strategies for recruitment, refine criteria for student selection, determine roles in database management and carry out individual case conferencing. In addition, staff across divisions and at various levels agreed on the goals and outcomes that they envisioned for Éxito. They talked about the program as a unified whole with two major instructional components, tutoring and enrichment classes, supported by the client management services. As one manager described it, "*Éxito is a whole unit, not just an after-school program, not just the individual parts.*"

Several staff members commented that the regular staff meetings attended by members of CYS and NFD were an important factor in the positive perception of teamwork. One staff member commented, "*I think meeting on a weekly basis with both departments was really key,*" and many others agreed. Another staff member pointed out, "*There is constant communication going on between myself and the rest of the team.*"

The regular attendance of Congreso vice presidents (VPs) at team meetings contributed to a clearer sense of leadership and accountability, as compared to the pilot. One manager described the lack of direction in the pilot stage: "*Last year there wasn't good communication. People were confused about what was going on. Everyone had different ideas about how to do it. A lot of stuff was being said [but] no one was following up.*" In contrast, a manager from the other division explained that the presence of strong leadership at the staff meetings helped to set an agenda and encourage organization and follow-through from team members. During an interview taking place at the end of the program, he asserted about collaboration, "*The greatest thing that happened this year is to see more VPs involved.*"

Another important function of the weekly meetings was the exchange of information and in-depth client conferencing about students in the program. For example, after-school program coordinators shared attendance data with PCMs at meetings so that client managers could follow up with their students who were not attending the program. In addition, because the after-school program staff saw the students more frequently, they often learned other information that was important for the client managers to know. PCMs shared information about students' home lives and circumstances that the after-school coordinators could then relay to the students' tutors. One CYS staff member described insights gained from the PCMs about the type of incentive or motivational strategies that may work with different students. Some tutors also expressed that knowing where the students were coming from helped them to better understand their behavior. The ability to exchange information and develop strategies for assisting individual students seemed to increase trust between the two divisions. One CYS coordinator stated, "*It was really working when we were all contributing information to figure out why [a student] was not attending. When communication was good, we were doing our best job*."

In addition to sharing information, trust was established when client managers participated in CYS events. For example, one client manager attended the Éxito retreat, run by CYS staff. In addition, PCMs attended the Éxito recognition and social events. CYS staff appreciated that client managers were willing to support their staff in these events.

The time that the Éxito staff spent working on team collaboration paid off. At the end of the year, all staff reported that there had been a fairly successful working relationship for the duration of the program. The team accomplished many tasks in the development of the program. However, as is to be expected, there were some points of tension throughout the year. Understanding these strains may be instructive as Éxito team leaders consider what is needed for the ongoing maintenance of the collaboration in the future.

Strains on the CYS-NFD Collaboration

While there was agreement on the goals and outcomes of the program, philosophical differences arose at its inception that related to the actual implementation of the model. These differences revolved around the flexibility of the model, the kinds of students that the program was designed for, and the capacities of the program. These opposing views in philosophy stemmed from the type of students each division was in the habit of serving. The CYS branch was accustomed to working with groups of students

who chose to be in one of its programs. For example, they operated job placement programs in which students were paid to participate. Since these programs were meant to prepare students for the world of work, non-compliance and lack of interest were not tolerated. NFD client managers, on the other hand, typically worked with less-motivated students in one-on-one client management settings. They provided services, for instance, for truant youth involved in the juvenile justice system.

For this reason, there was a lack of agreement over how flexible the program model should be with regard to eligibility criteria and the level of student commitment required. NFD staff tended to support a more inclusive enrollment policy that accepted students who were at high risk, regardless of special education status, and those who did not enter with high motivation or commitment. On the other hand, CYS staff were concerned about Éxito's capacity to serve unmotivated youth and students at very low skill levels, and therefore leaned toward limiting the program to regular education students.

As described in a chapter three, tension over eligibility criteria increased when enrollment numbers were lower than expected. The issue was eventually resolved, however, when Éxito's funding changed to a fee-for-service model requiring high enrollment numbers. The program experienced increased financial pressure to enroll students and decided to expand the eligibility criteria, eventually opening the program up to all Edison High School students.

While the Éxito team had developed effective processes for sharing information, it had not yet reached the level of trust and collaboration that allowed partners to provide constructive feedback to each other. One theory on the development of collaborations states that the highest level of collaboration is evident when each party is able to surrender some independence in order to support a common goal.[46] The two divisions still retained a degree of independence with regard to decisions about their own areas of work and kept a respectful distance when it came to commenting on the quality of the other department's work. This issue arose in the spring of the study year when the topic of improving the tutoring component surfaced in staff meetings. While staff members at higher levels felt that this was a surprise, others said that they had known of it for months, based on the information they had seen in the first-term grade reports. However, members of NFD said that they had felt uncomfortable raising questions about the other department's responsibilities. "*There is a fear of entering a terrain that is not yours...I don't want to step into someone else's job*." Once this reluctance to tread on the other division's territory was revealed, however, VPs encouraged staff to speak up more candidly. Nonetheless,

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[46] Gajda, R. (2004).

developing the capacity for conversations about sensitive cross-divisional issues may be the next step in the development of this collaboration. On the other hand, some staff pointed to the need for higher-level organizational leaders, not aligned with one department, to provide this type of accountability.

Finally, while weekly meetings were key to establishing a productive working team, at times the agendas did not balance the needs of both divisions. Sometimes the agendas were more centered on issues of the after-school program than client management issues. Finding ways to balance concerns and respect the time of both departments in weekly meetings will be important in the future.

In conclusion, the Éxito team made significant progress toward becoming a collaborative and productive alliance. Being able to share information at weekly meetings, particularly client conferencing, enabled the development of trust and respect across divisions. As the team continues its work together, it is important to keep in mind the inherent philosophical differences that may exist between departments as a result of the nature of their work. It will also be important to consider whether accountability should come from the two divisions themselves or whether that role resides in organizational leaders outside the two departments. The collaboration may also benefit from more efforts to connect direct service providers and PCMs.

Challenges within CYS

While progress was made in interdepartmental collaboration, some tensions emerged within the Children and Youth Services (CYS) department. As described in the chapter on implementation of the after-school program, the academic coordinator and enrichment coordinator had different perspectives on key issues in the operation of the program. In addition, this department experienced significant staff turnover over the course of the year. Two program managers (the position supervising the academic and enrichment coordinators and the overall program), the enrichment coordinator and the Vice President of the division moved on to other positions. Staff turnover is always a challenge to program development and to building collaborations. As new staff enter the Exito work groups, trust and group norms must be re-established. It will be important next year to make time for new staff to be fully integrated into the team.

Strengths of the Éxito-Edison Partnership

A foundational element of the Éxito program was the partnership with Edison High School. While research on similar community-school partnerships has shown that these programs often run into

predictable challenges, the cooperation between Congreso and Edison proved to be effective for program implementation. Indicative of the school's openness and trust of the Congreso organization, Edison administrators provided program staff significant access to the school and office space for one staff person. In addition, Éxito staff were given access to student data so that they could monitor the progress of participants.

Several factors contributed to the trust that existed in the partnership. Éxito staff had begun developing relationships with Edison during its pilot year. In fact, one high-level staff member had worked in schools and had a pre-existing relationship with the Edison principal. In addition, Éxito leaders organized monthly meetings with Edison administration to provide updates, coordinate efforts and address any problems. The goals of the Éxito program also seemed well-aligned with the needs and goals of the high school. Both partners agreed that reducing the dropout rate was important, and Exito fit a need for the school which had no tutoring services for its new ninth graders. Most importantly, however, Edison found Éxito staff responsive to their feedback. The school principal commented that "*Working with Congreso is the easy part*." When she raised any concerns with the organization, she observed immediate corrections or modifications. Furthermore, Edison's Student Success Center[47] facilitated exchanges between program staff and school personnel.

Challenges of the Éxito-Edison Partnership

At the same time, challenges were experienced by other school and program staff at the ground level. The client managers and academic coordinator reported difficulty getting time with school guidance counselors. However, staff at the Student Success Center were often able to provide the support that guidance counselors did not have time to provide. Program personnel also experienced some challenges working with Edison teachers, particularly those who were not a part of the after-school program. Teachers were at times resistant to sharing their classroom space with Éxito and found program staff's interruptions in classrooms during the school day problematic. The biggest challenge from the teachers' perspective was different norms or expectations of student behavior in the program as compared to the regular classroom. These concerns, some of which were addressed in the earlier chapter on implementation of the after-school program, partly dealt with the perception of some Edison teachers

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[47] Student Success Centers are currently operating in a small number of neighborhood high schools. They are intended to promote collaboration between schools and community organizations to assist students in areas such as career exploration, college preparation, academic and social support. http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/

that Éxito's norms were too permissive and/or rewarding toward students who displayed problematic behavior during the school day.

Éxito direct service staff, while acknowledging support from Edison's administration, wished the school leaders and guidance counselor could have been more accessible during the day but were aware of the constant demands placed on the school staff's time. These program staff also would have liked more support from the administration in getting Edison teachers on board with the program. This way, they would have felt like integrated members of the school community rather than guests.

The Éxito-Edison partnership overcame many of the hurdles that school-community partnerships typically experience, including the development of trust between school administrators and program staff. Edison's administrators trusted that Éxito's goals were aligned with their own and that the program's presence in the building during the school day would be handled appropriately. The administration's support, however, did not trickle down to all faculty members, some of whom found the program's occupancy in the school problematic. Nonetheless, partnership issues were not a significant impediment to the program's implementation in the first year.

Conclusion

In summary, the interdepartmental and Éxito collaborations necessary to implement Éxito developed successfully over the course of the 2008-09 school year. Teamwork between Children and Youth Services (CYS) and Neighborhood and Family Development (NFD) was at times uneven, but grew as the divisions acknowledged their unique contributions while concentrating on their joint mission. School leadership was constantly supportive and communicative with program staff. While there appeared to be greater challenges at the ground level of the partnerships, common themes in both collaborations were the demand for consensus about program implementation and the necessity of regular, balanced communication to resolve strains on cohesion.

Points for Discussion

- Lessons from the first year of implementing Éxito through collaboration should inform planning and decision-making for the upcoming year. Regular work team meetings enhance communication among partners and enable them to resolve tensions in a timely, efficient manner. Interdepartmental collaborations are strengthened by the presence of senior Congreso staff who can raise difficult questions, facilitate feedback on sensitive issues and strengthen accountability across the partnership.

- Both Congreso and Edison are large hierarchical institutions, and decisions made at higher levels do not always feel transparent at the ground level. These challenges, inherent within large institutions, are important to bear in mind as Éxito develops. Attention should also be given to communication with the after-school program instructors who are not able to attend Éxito work team meetings.

- Staff turnover is a common setback to program development, but with sufficient guidance new personnel can transition quickly. Moreover, an effective collaborative effort will require time for trust and communication practices to be re-established.

Chapter VIII
Conclusion

The 2008-09 school year was the first full year of implementation for the Éxito program. While the program was built on capacities that existed in Congreso, Éxito's particular model was a new initiative for the organization, combining after-school programming with client management services in an effort to address truancy and prevent student dropout at their neighborhood high school.

The Éxito program's first year, as is typical for new programs, was a year of growth and change. Recruitment criteria and strategies, enrollment policies, the program model, and members of the Éxito team all changed during the year. The Éxito team remained fluid and able to respond to challenges, demonstrating the progress that had been made in the development of trust and communication between CYS and NFD. Now, as the program enters its second year, Éxito staff are continuing to refine their approach. The lessons from the first year outlined in this report may help inform their decision-making.

Lesson 1: Continually engaging adolescents, particularly those at risk of dropping out, is a key challenge for the Éxito program.

Our evaluation of the Éxito program suggests that challenges in recruitment, ongoing student engagement, and program attrition proved to be significant issues in the first year that ultimately hindered the program's effectiveness. Recruiting students who were at risk for dropping out of high school was not easy. One-on-one contact with students seemed to be the most effective strategy. In the end, the program served not only students who entered high school with dropout "warning signs," but many other students as well, including upperclassmen, ninth grade repeaters, and students who did not meet eligibility risk criteria. While many of these students were not the most "at-risk", they were students at a chronically underperforming neighborhood high school and still in need of supports.

Once students were enrolled, it also proved difficult to engage them in an ongoing way—an issue common to OST programs for adolescents.[48] Some students completed the enrollment process but never showed up after school. Others attended inconsistently, or stopped coming altogether after attending only a few times. Students most at-risk for high school dropout were the most difficult to engage. It appears that the program's capacity for impact was hindered by students' low levels of participation. With only 25 students attending 45 or more after-school sessions—the level of "dosage"

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[48] Arbetron, A.J.A. et al. (2008); Herrera, C. & Arbreton, A.J.A. (2003); Lauver, S. et al. (2004); Russell, C.A. et al. (2008).

that research suggests will effect change in student outcomes—it is perhaps not surprising that the impact of the after-school program alone was not stronger. Increasing student attendance may contribute to greater impact of the after-school component of the program.

- *The program may need to clarify whether the priority is to recruit a large cohort of students with less stringent eligibility criteria, or a smaller cohort who are particularly at risk for dropping out of high school.*
- *Program staff should consider how they can use one-on-one recruitment strategies to reach and retain students who might benefit from the Éxito program, particularly those who meet risk criteria.*

Lesson 2: Group tutoring activities proved to be a "hard sell" for students yet students expressed a desire for one-to-one tutoring supports.

Particular challenges in the tutoring component of the program may have contributed to students' inconsistent participation and may be another factor in explaining why the program did not demonstrate greater impact on student grades. Often, tutoring activities, particularly English tutoring, was not rigorous or engaging enough to impact students grades. Many factors contributed to the difficulty of offering high quality tutoring, including a program structure that felt "too much like school." However, when students were able to receive individual attention from tutors, they were engaged and appreciated the opportunity for tutoring. The opportunity for individual attention and support in completing homework more consistently may have contributed to the small but significant impact of the after-school program on math grades.

Despite these challenges, the academic component of Éxito remains important if the program wishes to impact students' grades in math and English. At least a third of Éxito students failed math and English in ninth grade and these students will continue to need academic supports in the coming year. Several students said that they enrolled in the program *because* they wanted help improving their grades. Students reported that they appreciated the help they received when a tutor worked with them individually or in a small group.

- *Staff will need to develop approaches that make the academic component of the program seem different from regular school activities.*
- *The program may want to consider reducing the size of tutoring classes and offering individual tutoring as an option when students need it.*

- *The program may want to create an opening ritual which could create a space to address any future program changes and student confusion about the program. In addition, an opening ritual would help to create a distinction between school and the program.*

Lesson 3: When students received all three components of the program model, they had better school attendance.

The greatest impacts from Éxito were seen for students who received both client management services and participated in the after-school program. PCM students attended school an average of 7 more days than other students. In addition, client management services appeared to help students be more engaged in the Éxito program overall. We found a statistically significant relationship between PCM services and higher levels of participation in the after-school activities. Students and tutors commented on the impact of the PCM program. In spite of the potential for "stigma" attached to having a "case worker," PCM students were very appreciative of the opportunity to work with a PCM. PCMs developed trusting relationships with students, helped them set and work toward goals, and provided additional services to their families.

- *With PCM services a clear strength of the program, Éxito leadership may want to consider expanding this component to serve more students.*

Lesson 4: Literacy skills are more difficult to impact

While a majority of Éxito participants passed English 1, 28% of participants failed. In addition, unlike with math grades, neither the full program model nor the partial model had an impact on English grades. Literacy outcomes for adolescents are typically more difficult to impact.[49] Éxito may want to tap into new intervention strategies and resources being developed in the area of adolescent literacy.

Lesson 5: Students with behavioral issues need more supports

While about half of the students entering Éxito with 2 or more suspensions in eighth grade improved their behavior in ninth grade, other Éxito participants experienced behavioral issues in ninth grade and were suspended multiple times. A total of 27 Éxito participants ended the year with 2 or more suspensions. Client management services were one strategy for supporting these students. However, the program needs to develop additional strategies that can be in place in the after-school program,

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[49] Based on Grade 11 PSSA data provided by Edison Annual Report. Available at
http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/uploads/0K/TP/0KTPxJaeEjL3fIQ9e7Q-jQ/REPORTcard_HS-HS.pdf

where a handful of students can create difficulties for instructors if their needs are not being met. Strategies for addressing behavioral issues could dovetail with policies, incentives and consequences for student behavior in the after-school program in general. The development of behavior management strategies would need to balance retaining students in the program with helping students develop healthy coping responses and creating an environment within the program that is conducive to learning.

Lesson 6: Structures were in place that supported successful collaborations between divisions and with Edison High School.

While collaboration between departments and organizations often proves challenging,[50] our evaluation suggests that the collaboration between the NFD and CYS divisions that comprised the Éxito program, as well as the partnership between Éxito and Edison High School were largely successful in coordinating logistics and communicating information that allowed staff to better meet individual student needs. Regular staff meetings and meetings with Edison administrators provided the infrastructure for these successful collaborations. Some tensions did develop, however, between program staff and the Edison teachers including those who served as the after-school tutors and those who did not. These tensions were due, in part, to disagreements about approaches to classroom management and sharing classroom space.

- *Éxito should continue to have regular interdepartmental staff meetings, allowing client managers and after-school staff to share information about individual students. This may be particularly important as new staff are integrated into the program.*
- *Éxito may want to consider developing a code of conduct that clarifies expectations for both tutors and program staff regarding instructional and disciplinary practices.*
- *Time must be taken to integrate new staff into existing work teams and to re-establish trust and communication practices.*

Lesson 7: A clear vision and theory of action is central to successful implementation of the program model.

While staff had a clear and consistent idea of the role each program component played in the overall program model, the tutoring component encountered challenges over the course of the year in part because a clear vision for this component of the program had not developed. In addition, the focus on dropout prevention waivered as staff struggled to enroll students meeting the eligibility criteria. As the

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[50] Gajda, R. (2004).

program moves into its second year, and the program model continues to evolve, it remains important to revisit the programs goals and articulate how modifications to the program model fit into a theory of action for reducing truancy and the dropout rate. For example, it will be important to develop a theory of action connecting project-based learning activities to the outcomes that are linked to dropping out of school. Questions to consider include how project-based learning will support course passage, improve attendance or reduce suspensions. It will be important to consider whether elements of the project-based learning activities need to be standardized across projects and how much discretion instructors will be given to develop project content.

- *Éxito should consider developing a clear theory of action, articulating how the activities and interventions that comprise each program component are aligned with larger program goals.*
- *The theory of action should also incorporate the needs of ELL students.*

Lesson 8: One-on-One relationships make a difference in recruitment, retention, attendance and academic supports

A theme throughout this research was the importance of personalized intervention strategies and supportive adult-student relationships. Recruitment and retention were facilitated by one-one contact. Students' valued individual attention they received in tutoring and the PCM component of the program. Éxito may want to consider ways to reduce the staff/student ratio to enable the development of supportive adult-student relationships and more personalized supports particularly for students who enter the program meeting the original risk criteria. The program could ensure that at minimum, these students have the opportunity to bond with a client manager, a program instructor or other Éxito staff who can offer a more personalized approach. In addition, future iterations of Éxito may want to consider developing relationships with students exhibiting the original risk criteria when they are in middle school so that Éxito is a trusted and familiar source of support as students enter the ninth grade transition.

In conclusion, the Éxito program has made great strides in its first year. In spite of the normal growing pains of a new program, Éxito was able to make a difference for some of its participants. Lessons learned in the first year can only strengthen the program's efforts and enable it to impact more students. Future research will continue to document the development of the program and its ability to keep Edison high school students on-track to graduation.

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