Learning What It Takes

An Initial Look at how Schools are using Early Warning Indicator Data and Collaborative Response Teams to Keep All Students on Track to Success

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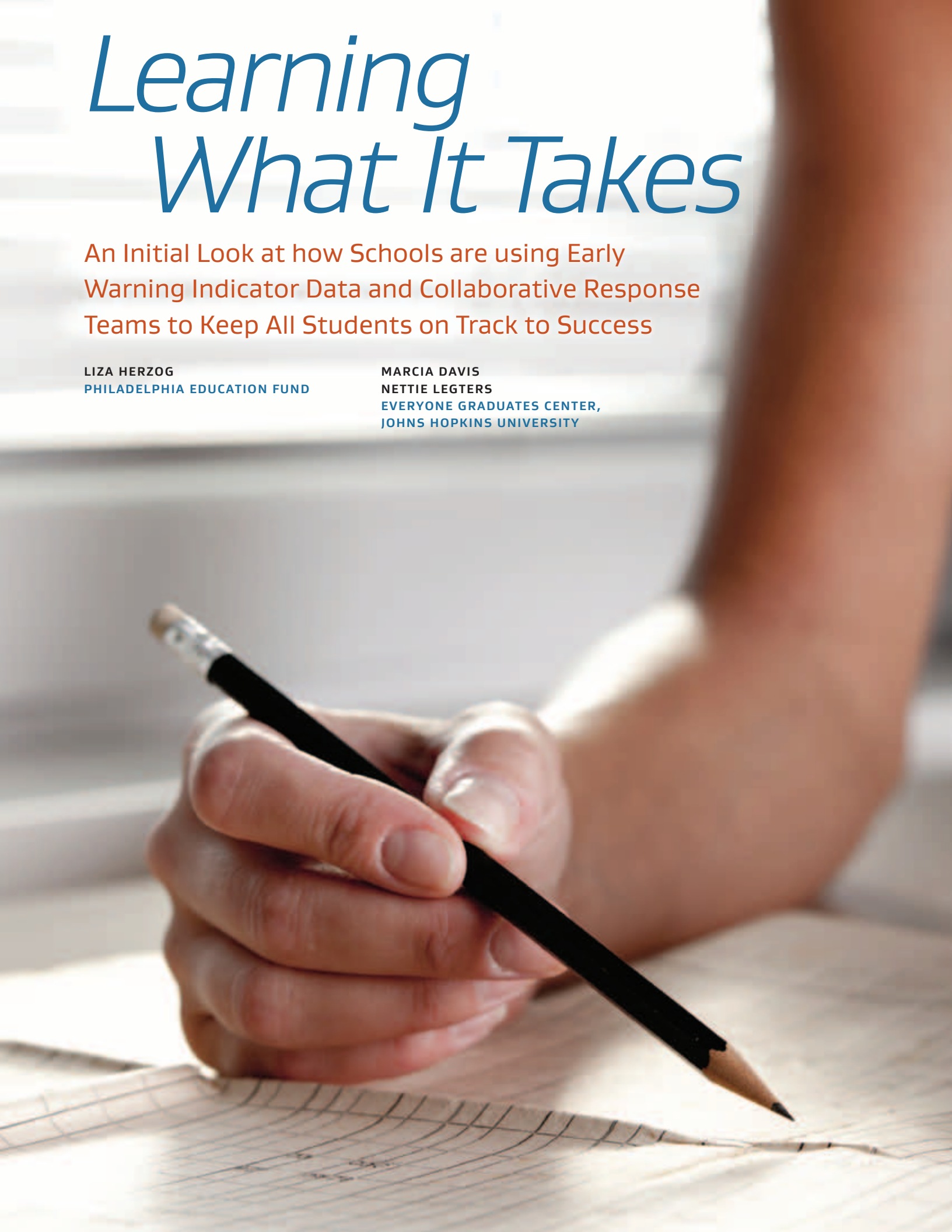

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Introduction

Growing alarm over high dropout rates has created a groundswell of interest in ways to identify and respond to the needs of students at risk of falling off the graduation path. Groundbreaking research finds a substantial percentage of eventual dropouts can be identified at key transition points (sixth and ninth grades) using attendance, behavior, and course performance indicators from student data that are routinely collected in virtually all schools. This research, coupled with increased electronic access to data, is propelling districts and schools to begin developing early warning and collaborative response systems. These systems are using student-level administrative data to identify students who, absent effective intervention, face a great likelihood of not graduating from high school. They enable district- and school-based teams of adults to respond to student needs in an appropriate, coordinated, and timely manner, and continuously monitor student progress towards graduation.

THE PROMISE OF EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS IS THAT THEY:

- use readily available data to identify students who, absent intervention, are likely to drop out;
- enable teachers and administrators to cut through the massive amounts of data they receive to focus on the most important indicators that can be incorporated into real-time data systems to permit monitoring of student progress;
- help schools and districts identify and examine the most effective ways to help students stay "on-track" to graduation;

MOST IMPORTANTLY, THESE SYSTEMS CAN:

- accurately identify students at high risk of dropping out years before they leave school, providing educators and administrators time to intervene to get students back on track, and insight into how that can best be accomplished.

As noted in the recent national report *On Track to Success* (Bruce, et. al, 2011), which examines the current state of early warning system implementation across the country, using early warning indicators (EWIs) to intervene with students who are falling off-track is a relatively new practice. Schools and districts are just beginning to understand, design, and develop their own EWI systems to maximize their impact on student engagement and achievement.

To learn more, we visited middle and high schools in cities across the country to observe how they are using EWIs to monitor and respond to student needs. These schools were either field testing or implementing Diplomas Now, a school turnaround model that combines whole school improvement with enhanced student supports all guided by a data-driven early warning system. A few were in the initial stages of implementing the full Diplomas Now model (including school-wide organizational, curriculum, and instructional reforms), while others were just implementing prototypes of Diplomas Now's tiered student supports intervention component. As such, while all the schools were implementing elements of Diplomas Now, they varied in what they were implementing and their level of experience with the model's early warning system technology. This variation means that the schools we visited offer a broad-based sampling of the challenges and opportunities early warning systems will present school staff as they work to bring the power and promise of these systems into their schools.

In each school, we asked: *What do the school-based EWI reporting and response systems look like? What does it take to implement EWI reporting and response systems well? What are the primary challenges to implementation?* This report presents our initial findings. We begin by describing what EWIs are and how they fit into the Diplomas Now model, followed by a composite snapshot of an EWI meeting based on our observations across schools. We then explore five themes that describe how the EWI process is working in selected schools:

1. **Professional development and start-up**
2. **Identifying students for intervention**
3. **The EWI meeting process**
4. **EWI data systems**
5. **Interventions and follow-up**

We conclude our report with reflections on the promise and challenges to implementing early warning systems and next steps for further inquiry.

Early Warning Indicators: Building Blocks of an Early Warning System

Early Warning Indicators are

empirically developed signals indicating that a student's chances of graduating from high school are low. In pioneering work in Chicago and Philadelphia, these indicators were empirically developed from administrative data that are typically kept by school districts about their students (Allensworth and Easton, 2005, 2007; Neild and Balfanz, 2006; Neild, Balfanz, and Herzog, 2007). This research shows that the strongest indicators—those that are most predictive of eventual graduation or promotion outcomes and that identify the majority of eventual dropouts—are attendance, behavior in school, and course passing/credit accumulation. For example, in Philadelphia, sixth-graders who failed English or mathematics for the year, received a single poor behavior mark on a report card, or attended school less than 80 percent of the time had a 75 percent chance of dropping out of high school.

Research in Philadelphia has demonstrated that EWIs can be identified as early as the sixth grade. Further, the strongest indicators are the same regardless of whether one looks in the sixth, eighth, or ninth grade. In Philadelphia, about 80 percent of the eventual dropouts in a cohort could be identified using attendance, behavior, and course performance.

Empirically narrowing the most predictive signals is just the first step in finding a way to help schools and districts keep their students on track to graduation. In some ways, the identification of indicators is the "low hanging fruit" of Early Warning System work. The much more difficult challenges involve getting accurate, useful data to teachers in a timely way, and developing school-level organizational practices that allow educators to respond with the right intervention when students are falling off track.

Diplomas Now Early Warning Systems

In Fall 2006, with technical assistance from Johns Hopkins University and the Philadelphia Education Fund, two middle schools in Philadelphia began using EWIs to target interventions for students. The success of the work in these schools helped inspire Diplomas Now, a comprehensive secondary school reform program guided by an early warning system. In 2010, Diplomas Now received a highly competitive federal Investing in Innovation (i3) grant to test the approach in middle and high schools across the country.[1]

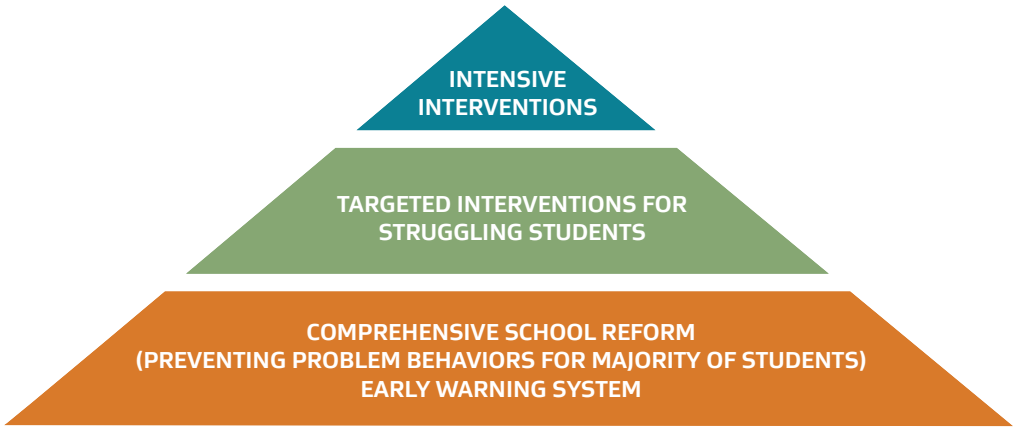
A central feature of Diplomas Now is collaboration of the lead school reform partner—Johns Hopkins University's Talent Development Secondary whole school transformation model (and, in Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Education Fund)—with organizations that can provide personal attention and support to students with off-track indicators and professional intervention as needed: City Year, which brings a team of young adults ("near peers") to the school to provide literacy and math tutoring, attendance and behavior coaching, assignment completion support, and enrichment programming before, during and after school, totaling 1,700 hours of service per corps member per school year; and Communities in Schools, which provides a full-time on-site masters-level social worker/site coordinator for students requiring intensive behavioral and/or social supports. Each Diplomas Now school has a School Transformation Facilitator (STF), sometimes called an on-site coordinator. Among other duties, the STF provides current attendance, behavior, and course performance data and facilitates bi-weekly early warning system meetings in which teams of teachers who share common groups of students and other student support staff work together to interpret the data and design and plan effective interventions.[2]

The idea behind the Diplomas Now early warning system is to push out EWI data to alert teachers and administrators as soon as students begin to demonstrate behaviors that will likely push them off the path to graduation if left unattended. These early warning data trigger a tiered response system that combines both prevention and intervention strategies and steadily increases the intensity of support until the student is back on the right path, and beyond, to help the student maintain on-track status. Key components of this early warning and tiered response system include:

1. a three-tiered prevention and intervention model: Tier 1, *comprehensive, whole-school practices* designed to keep all students on track; Tier 2, targeted interventions for the 15%-40% of students who require additional focused support; and Tier 3, intensive intervention reserved for the 5%-15% of students in need of small group or one-on-one supports;

1. In addition to federal funding, Diplomas Now was seeded and continues to receive substantial support from its founding investor, the PepsiCo Foundation. The William Penn Foundation supported the original research which identified the early warning indicators in Philadelphia, as well as the early implementation work in Philadelphia middle grade schools that inspired Diplomas Now. The Pearson Foundation supported the research and writing of this report. See *www.diplomasnow.org* for more information.

2. In some Diplomas Now schools, electronic data systems are fully realized; in others, these data systems are nascent.



2. regularly updated student indicator data to interdisciplinary teacher teams, support staff, and administrators;
3. at least bi-weekly meetings of school EWI teams to discuss students with indicators, plan interventions, and follow up on implemented interventions; and,
4. a "second team of adults" (consisting of JHU/local facilitators, City Year corps members, and CIS staff) to assist in the delivery of interventions.

What Is Diplomas Now?

Diplomas Now is an innovative approach to turning around the lowest-performing middle and high schools in America's largest cities. The model is based on groundbreaking research that tracked 13,000 students from sixth grade through one year past on-time graduation and identified four Early Warning Indicators that correlate most strongly with students dropping out of school: low attendance, poor behavior, a failing grade in math or literacy. Designed to help ensure that every student graduates ready for college or career, Diplomas Now integrates curriculum and instructional reforms with targeted and intensive student support through a unique partnership of three national nonprofits: Johns Hopkins University's Talent Development Secondary, a school reform model that improves instruction and school performance; City Year's team of in-school, "near peer" Ameri-Corps student support coaches; and Communities in Schools' in-school trained site coordinator/case managers for the neediest students. Developed and piloted in Philadelphia in partnership with the Philadelphia Education Fund, Diplomas Now operates in more than 30 schools in 11 districts nationwide. With the support of the PepsiCo Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education (through the Investing in Innovation Fund), and the United Way, Diplomas Now continues to expand and is undergoing a rigorous third-party evaluation by MDRC. To learn more, visit *www.diplomasnow.org*

Research Design and Methods

This report draws on data gathered through systematic observations and interviews in schools implementing data-driven teaming processes. Between March 2010 and May 2011, the authors visited 11 Diplomas Now schools in seven cities. During each day-long visit, we observed team meetings and recorded meeting length, meeting attendance, number of students discussed, how the team used early warning data and other student information, and what interventions were discussed and implemented. We also interviewed administrators, teachers, Diplomas Now school transformation facilitators, City Year staff (team leaders, project managers and corps members), and Communities in Schools (CIS) site coordinators and social workers at each school. We used structured interview protocols to collect data about meeting processes, roles and responsibilities, interventions and their perceived impact on students, and successes and challenges. Across the schools, we observed 13 team meetings and conducted 75 interviews. The team analyzed observation and interview data using a consensual qualitative research (CQR) approach (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997) to identify and substantiate consistent themes.

We also analyzed data from five Diplomas Now schools in depth, which we tapped for examples in this report. Characteristics of these five schools are summarized in table 1 (all school names are pseudonyms).

TABLE 1: Characteristics of Five Diplomas Now Schools

Name	Level	Location (all urban)	Population	Proficiency
Bryant	PK-8	East coast	442 Students 100% minority (B) 96% FRL	*Math: 28%* *ELA: 22%*
Highland	Middle (6-8)	West coast	1,722 Students 98% minority (H) 92% FRL	Math: 23% ELA: 27%
Lakeside	Middle (6-8)	West coast	1,790 Students 98% minority (H) 92% FRL	Math: 27% ELA: 25%
Mabry	Middle (6-8)	Southern	878 Students 98% minority (H) 95% FRL	Math: 12% ELA: 32%
Tabor	K-8	Northeast coast	Students 90% minority (B, H) 85% FRL	Math: 56.4% ELA: 44.2%

** Proficiency means % students in the school who scored at proficiency or above. Data for Mabry, however, were reported as % "commended" which we interpreted to proficiency or above.*

A Window In: What Happens During An EWI Team Meeting?

The loudspeaker at Mabry Middle School crackled: Please excuse the interruption. The EWI meeting will begin in two minutes.

The eighth grade EWI team was already gathering in a colleague's classroom where it meets every other week during this period for common planning. The core academic teachers, the school's academic coordinator, the City Year team leader, program manager and four corps members, the Communities in Schools (CIS) site coordinator, and a CIS social worker took their seats around the long table.

The Diplomas Now School Transformation Facilitator (STF) got ready to start the meeting, projecting the pre-populated Student Tracker on a large screen. The tracker showed enrollment, withdrawals, team assignment, special designation (e.g., special education), attendance, behavior and course performance data, standardized test data and intervention type and date for each student on the EWI team's Focus List.

The Focus List is a dynamic document, bringing to the team's attention those students whose EWIs—Attendance, Behavior and Course-Passing in mathematics and English—show they may be losing interest in school or are struggling to keep up with coursework. At first, the team scanned for students who were "only slightly off-track," for whom school staff thought it could "move the needle," perhaps quickly, in the direction of staying in school and doing well. As the year continued, teachers would recommend students for the Focus List, often between meetings, who were both close to, and far from, being on-track. These students were then brought to the attention of the group at the next EWI meeting. If, at the meeting, two or more teachers agreed that a particular student needed support, he or she would be added to the Focus List.

" I'll begin to see her individually now," offers the CIS Site Coordinator. "She is one of several students with seriously ill parents." The academic coordinator adds: "I can add some extra tutoring if there's a test coming up."

Today, there are nine students on the Focus List. The STF pulls up the data on Student A and launches a discussion, beginning as is customary with a reference to the previous meeting:

"Student A seems to still be having trouble in math. You were going to meet with her, weren't you?" he addresses a City Year corps member.

Team members begin a lively conversation, with one member serving as a recorder.

"Yes, I invited her to After-School Heroes and homework help, but she's already in mandatory tutoring. I'm trying to get her into Math Games and other activities. We need her mother to sign a permission slip, but she told me 'my mom doesn't care what I do.'"

The Academic Coordinator added: "Her mom has a serious illness. By telling you that mom doesn't care what she does, Student A is crying out for help. Let's take time for her."

"I've moved her closer to me in my classroom, for a little proximity control," says the social studies teacher.

"She's quiet but comfortable with the kids she knows," says the City Year corps member.

The STF asks the team to look more closely at Student A's data: Attendance, OK; No behavior referrals; Math, 73; Reading, passing. "She's on track, except for in math. That seems to be her weakness," observes another teacher.

"She's only passed one of three significant tests," says the Academic Coordinator, refining the issue.

"She barely missed passing one of them, though."

"We will keep working with her in math, and trying to motivate her," adds a City Year corps member.

"I'll begin to see her individually now," offers the CIS Site Coordinator. "She is one of several students with seriously ill parents."

"I can add some extra tutoring, if there's a test coming up," remarks the Academic Coordinator.

The discussion focuses on the positive and moves quickly to intervention possibilities.

The facilitator makes notes in the intervention column on the Student Tracker, listing the type, source, and level[3] of intervention. The EWI team also uses Intervention Logs whereby team members list risks by student, and the interventions tried, with a note as to what seems to be working and what is not. In the case of Student A, the Log reads: "City Year will continue to try to engage her, particularly in math-help activities; CIS Site Coordinator will meet with her before the next EWI meeting about her mother's illness and any help she might need; math teacher will continue to tutor her."

3. School-wide, targeted, or intensive.

The Log is kept in the Academic Coordinator's office, where all team members can access it.

"Great," summarizes the STF. "If we can help her get that math grade up and deal, even a little, with her mother's illness, Student A could be back on track. We might even be able to take her off our list." She might indeed, be one of those students for whom the team could "move the needle."

The entire discussion of Student A took 6-8 minutes. The team would cover all nine students in its allotted hour, though "our last meeting went on for an hour and a half," the eighth-grade reading teacher clarifies.

"Meetings are a great mechanism because you have not only City Year input, but also the STF, CIS, and teachers," offers a corps member. "They're a great way to focus on the right indicators, and the appropriate source of support."

Heading into its second year of EWI meetings, the team seems to be perfecting the process, using this sacred time more and more masterfully as the school year wears on.

"You don't even notice that the time goes by [in the EWI meetings]," mentions the reading teacher. "We get to the point quickly, efficiently. It's time used wisely."

Heading into its second year of EWI meetings, the team seems to be perfecting the process, using this sacred time more and more masterfully as the school year wears on.

Insights and Lessons Learned

Interviews and observations

revealed how each school used EWIs and adapted the data-driven response team model. In the following pages, we describe what school teams encountered in their first years of implementing early warning and response systems, and the lessons they learned along the way. We focus on five areas that emerged as especially rich with insights. Our discussion of each area begins with an overview of the common themes that emerged from our analyses across all schools, followed by highlights drawn from our observations and interviews, and concludes with the main points that readers can "take-away" to guide future practice.

Definitions

School Transformation Facilitator (STF)
The School Transformation Facilitator is an on-site coordinator for the Diplomas Now (DN) program. The STF collects and manages all DN student data (attendance, behavior, and course performance), leads the EWI team meetings, facilitates communication among partners, and is the "grease and the glue" of DN.

Early Warning Indicators (EWIs)
Signals indicating that a student's chances of graduating from high school are in jeopardy. EWIs most predictive of the majority of eventual dropouts are attendance, behavior in school, and English and/or math course-passing.

EWI Team
The STF, teachers, City Year staff, and Communities in Schools staff who meet formally weekly or biweekly for EWI meetings. At some schools, the team may also include school counselors and administrators who work with the same group of students.

EWI Meeting
The DN team's weekly or biweekly gathering to discuss and plan interventions for individual students showing indicators for dropping out of high school.

Focus List
A list of students showing one or more EWIs. Typically, 6-10 students are selected from the Focus List to be discussed per EWI meeting.

Diplomas Now
A proven approach to helping the most-challenged students in America's largest cities prepare for college or career through a partnership among three nonprofits: Johns Hopkins University Talent Development Secondary/Philadelphia Education Fund, City Year, and Communities in Schools, along with school districts and funders. It is the first fully integrated approach that improves a school's curriculum and instruction while "providing the right students with the right support at the right time."

City Year
A non-profit organization that brings young adults, 17-24 years old, into a school to provide literacy and math tutoring, attendance and behavior coaching, and enrichment programming.

Communities in Schools (CIS)
A nationwide network of professionals working in public schools to surround students with a community of support. CIS provides an on-site coordinator, often a masters-level social worker to organize and case-manage interventions for students requiring intensive social and behavioral supports at DN schools; at some DN schools, 1-2 interns provide additional support.

Talent Development Secondary (TDS)
A research-based comprehensive secondary school reform model developed and operated by the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University.

Philadelphia Education Fund
A member of the Public Education Network, advancing the mission of improving the quality of public education in the Philadelphia region so that youth are prepared for college and careers. The Ed Fund plays an integral role in education reform and serves as the lead partner for Diplomas Now in Philadelphia.

Professional Development and Start Up

Before the School Year Begins

In most cases, schools are introduced to the EWI process during a three-day summer institute attended by the principal, and in some cases, several additional members from the school leadership team. They are joined by many of the staff from JHU/Talent Development, City Year, and Communities In Schools that would be leading the on-the-ground efforts to implement the EWS system in the participating Diplomas Now schools. For those able to attend, the institute is a largely well-received training event, variously described as substantively strong, powerful, and a great opportunity for planning and sharing across sites.

"When I first learned about [DN] at the Institute, I was really excited about it. It seemed targeted, research-based, and made sense. I really wanted to target the dropout crisis and felt lucky to be part of a systemic effort to do this. Now, I'm really attached to [DN]. I've seen it work and I've seen it really help students. To see what actually works for each student makes everything clear."

—City Year Team Leader, Year Two Site

"We need more than 20 minutes of training at the beginning of the year. We get introduced to so much, it feels like 1,000 different interventions every year. So when something is introduced, we think, how long will this last?"

—Teacher, 7th grade science

Teachers, administrators, and other staff we interviewed who had not participated in the institute expressed the need for more training, however. They received an overview at their school, but did not understand exactly how each component worked together, or how to analyze, interpret and use the data, and more generally, why the EWI system is important and how it works to help students. This group of teachers would have liked to view an EWI meeting, have a chance to practice working through the data reports, and clearly understand the roles and expectations of the various partners.

With funds from the federal Investing in Innovation grant (i3) Diplomas Now was awarded in 2010, Diplomas Now has developed a more extensive training module, including video of mock EWI meetings and simulated data discussions.

" If the school doesn't have an accurate and well-rounded picture of EWI, we're [school staff] swimming upstream. It's hard to change the culture."—Administrator

Support from school administration is a strong influence on teacher buy-in. In those schools where the DN team came on-site early, and where the staff was thoroughly introduced to DN, both operationally and conceptually, school teams leant their spirit and energy. The more that school administration can reinforce the importance of a program, said teachers, the more time and energy the teaching staff puts into understanding and implementing it. At one site, the principal made sure that at least one administrator attended weekly DN team meetings, and arranged the school day so that teachers had time to meet that a) did not subsume their planning time, or b) compensated teachers for the missed planning time. Teachers felt supported by these organizational efforts and were more likely to attend and participate in team meetings than teachers in schools where this was not the case.

The experiences of the first- and second-year schools implementing an EWI system revealed the significance of having the full implementation and intervention support team in place prior to the start of the school year, and providing a means for them and the teacher teams that would be implementing the EWI process to plan, train, and practice before the school year begins. In situations where funding, school schedules, or prior commitments to other training needs did not allow this to happen, a late start and lack of clear structure at the outset resulted in constant revising and resetting of expectations and norms that hindered confidence, buy-in, and efficacy.

A central lesson from our interviews is the importance of having all partners on hand and, as much as possible, ensuring that they are visibly integrated with one another and into the school's operation from the outset. Of course, norming and integration occur over time, but are easier and more efficient if the partners have time to prepare and organize before school opens.

Getting Started

One clear theme that emerged from observations and interviews was the importance of staff dedicated to organizing and leading the EWI meetings. Because of funding constraints, Bryant did not have a school transformation facilitator (STF) in place until mid-school year, meaning that the responsibility for organizing and facilitating EWI meetings rotated among several teachers and counselors during the first marking period.

This lack of structure, so early in the year, was extremely challenging—no one was actively tracking data, or really "in charge" of facilitating meetings and forging relationships between DN partners and school staff. After the arrival of the STF, EWI team members reported being more focused and organized. The STF was "the grease and the glue," bringing all pieces together. Interviewees reported that the direction of the meetings improved once the STF was on board providing consistent focus and facilitation.

> *"We all put our heads together, to tweak and modify."*—Teacher

With strong support and commitment from the school principal at Bryant, more than 90% of scheduled EWI team meetings were held in the second marking period. The remaining 10% of the time, the meeting was co-opted for testing or parent conferences, and was cancelled on the rare occasion the STF was out of the building. Nearly everyone participates, though interviews indicated that teacher attendance was more consistent after the STF took the helm. While EWI meetings are held during a common prep period, teachers sometimes get pulled into meetings ad hoc. In 2011-12, teams plan to schedule their meetings early in the day to optimize teacher attendance and eliminate the "mid-day struggle."

Teams at Mabry focused on the seventh grade in 2009-10 and on the eighth grade in 2010-11, in the spirit of creating a DN cohort. In 2009-10, the school's first year with DN, the school operated EWI process without an STF, while the Academic Coordinator temporarily carried out the STF's duties. In the summer of 2010, the search for an STF hit high gear. On the principal's recommendation, a long-time collaborator with the school who directed a student support program there for several years, applied for the position. In September 2010, he attended Diplomas Now training in Baltimore and began work in his new role as STF later that month. Mabry's biggest challenge was the lack of dedicated personnel to lead and organize EWI meetings and interventions in 2009-10. The teachers reported a general sensation of "feeling our way through." The Academic Coordinator took over facilitation of the meetings and as many other duties as she could handle. When the STF arrived in 2010-11, it was a few weeks into the academic year. Without a strong STF from the start, the team found it hard to recover. The tone was set. The STF ended up taking on more of a data coordination role in his attempt to make the shift into a valued STF by mid-year.

Another theme which emerged was the importance of administrative support to protect EWI meetings from competing events, needs, and interests. EWI meetings at Tabor, for example, were instituted at the beginning of the school year but had a hard time taking hold due to various conflicts—teacher assemblies, principal walk-throughs, professional development, extreme weather. In the spring, the meetings were well-attended, due in small part to the time shift (during teacher prep), teacher incentive (teachers are compensated for their prep), and support and commitment from the school principal. About 15 team members attend every meeting, and nearly everyone participates.

> *"Even if the first year seems tough and ineffective, don't scrap the EWI meeting for anything!"*
>
> —8th grade science teacher after two years of Diplomas Now

Building Trust and Collective Efficacy

In addition to sufficient training and consistent support and facilitation, the interviews revealed that establishing trust and a sense of collective efficacy among the adults participating in the EWI process was a key to success. At Highland there were issues with teacher buy-in. Some teachers were not on board right away. One team in particular had members disagreeing, struggling,

and showing up late or not at all. At first, the CIS site coordinator tried to counsel everyone on the team to find a solution. The STF felt that some of the problems occurred when teachers had misconceptions about what the meeting would be like, the goals of the program and its limitations. Eventually, with some help from a patient City Year corps member, the team finally gelled. This year about 90% of the members are doing well and really getting into the meetings.

" One of our EWI team members who was struggling at first is now a star."—CIS site coordinator

One interviewee at Highland believed that teachers and team members started to be more productive when the administrator took the EWI training. An administrator at Highland said his role in the EWI process is to make sure the EWI meetings are happening and the team members are present, allow common conference time to meet, and provide coverage if needed to allow this time. The administrator also agreed that the summer EWI training he received, especially the mock EWI meetings, helped him understand better how to have productive meetings. The administrator also shares information he gets from attending the small EWI meetings with those attending the larger weekly school meetings, which are similar to EWI meetings, but are mandated by the state. These cover all the students in the school and include the school psychologist, administrators, behavior counselor, and school counselors.

" The school didn't know it was doing DN until late in the summer. We [City Year] wanted to do it. . . we already had a partnership at the school, and a good relationship with [the District]. In September, City Year was the only on-the-ground presence—we didn't have an [STF] or CIS. I was already hired to work in the school but they hadn't hired others. There should be a requirement to hire on-the-ground folks prior to the [DN] Summer Institute."

—City Year Program Manager

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND START-UP:

- Make roles and responsibilities in the early warning system clear.
- Find time in the summer for training and planning. Once the school year begins, it can be almost impossible to find time for intensive professional development.
- The full EWI support and intervention team needs to be in place, and working together, if at all possible, before the school year begins.
- Ensure administration and teacher buy-in early. Without this support, the teams can operate neither logistically nor conceptually.
- Administrators should be encouraged to attend EWI training.
- Find the right time for teams to meet. Teams can struggle with absent teachers mainly because teachers faced competing time demands.

Identifying Students for Support

Building the Focus List

In every school we visited the early warning support and intervention teams worked from a "Focus List" typically developed during the first few weeks of the school year. The initial list includes data for incoming students, with particular attention to those students who finished the previous school year with low attendance, poor behavior, and/or failed math or English. Students who display early warning signals in the first weeks of school are added to the List. From there, EWI teams use the Focus List as a dynamic tool to determine which students' needs are targeted, supported, and prioritized during—and between—EWI meetings.

> *"Between EWI meetings, we may make recommendations [to the STF] for additions to the Focus List. We are continually prioritizing students for supports through observation, even those students who may not be considered "eligible" for referrals."*—Teacher, 6th grade Math

The individual who is primarily responsible for developing Focus Lists varies from school to school. In most DN schools we visited, the EWI team relied on the STF to collect all student data from which the team would identify students for services, and to bring an updated list to each (weekly or bi-weekly) meeting. In one school, City Year played a lead role in identifying students and corps members remained active participants in the team meetings. In other schools, the STF created the initial Focus List, yet accepted rolling referrals from teachers and administrators throughout the year. EWI meetings also provided opportunities for teachers to present recommendations to the List; at some schools, the STF reserves time—either opens or closes the meeting with an invitation for suggestions.

School teams typically revisited their Focus Lists at the start of each marking period, noting improvements (e.g. students who moved up a track or more—from being Off-track to Sliding Off-Track or On-Track) and being mindful to continue support, if at a lower degree of intensity. Other students may roll onto the Focus List because of indicators emerging during the school year, and team members need to develop a way to deploy staff and accommodate the shifting numbers of students.

Focusing the Focus List

One clear theme that emerged from interviews and observations involved a constant tension and balancing act the EWI teams faced in deciding which students to direct their attention and energies towards. Different schools arrived at different solutions. Early on in the school year at Bryant, for example, the team focus was on students with "high-frequency EWIs," or those incoming students who finished out the previous school year with one or more indicators: low attendance, poor behavior, and/or failed math or English. As the year continued, at the principal's request, the team tried to broaden its reach to those students who may not have indicators. For example, some students do not come into the school year carrying one or more EWI per se, yet undergo serious family issues and/or seem to be "acting out of character." These signals, which may become obvious throughout the year, are important to acknowledge and address as potential root causes of EWIs.

> *" An acute crisis, such as a death in the family, can put a kid on the Focus List. This year, a student's father was murdered."*
>
> —CIS Site Coordinator

Highland is unique in that City Year corps members lead the nomination process of students to the Focus List. In the classroom, corps members observe and select students for discussion at the next EWI meeting. Before the meeting, corps members will solicit advice from the classroom teacher(s) with whom they work so that everyone is on the same page. Interviewees at Highland concurred that City Year corps members can accurately identify students in trouble, because corps members follow students throughout the day.

> *" Before I began with DN, my energies would typically fall to the student that I'd been having the most trouble with, who refused to do the work, a student who I perceived as having many issues. It's easy to miss those "quietly failing" students."*
>
> —City Year Corps Member

The STF at Tabor collects all student EWI data on a Focus List, from which the team works and assigns interventions. The STF might let the teachers know that at a particular meeting, the focus will be on literacy or math. The STF is careful to keep a balance between grades and not let a single grade level dominate. The STF creates groups by unique need (e.g., sixth-grade students with Ds in math) and may pull that group for extra help during a prep period. For a group carrying three or four indicators (typically 5-8 students at any time), the STF might pull the group during lunch and ask the students to lead a school or class activity, such as a contest for which the students make their own rules.

Some EWI teams at the schools visited showed a keen interest in those kids for whom school staff thought they could "move the needle," i.e., who were slightly off-track, while others embraced the difficulty of supporting the "most off-track" students, or those faced with multiple challenges. EWI teams use various supporting indicators to determine whether—and at what level—support is needed. While the leading, empirically developed academic indicator is course grades in math and/or English, other indicators, such as reading level, test scores, and personal observations are considered when designing

academic interventions. Teachers we interviewed confirmed that course grades were, for them, "more telling than test scores, as grades begin to slip before we see test scores change."

Navigating the Behavior Indicator

In nearly every DN school we visited, teams felt unsettled about the behavior indicator. Report card comments and even office referrals may indicate an underlying problem with a student, or simply point to a poor relationship with one individual teacher. The vagaries of day-to-day human behavior render it difficult for an individual (a teacher, assigned to thirty or more students) to attach a generalizable value to the behavior of students. One way schools have gotten around this is by using as cumulative a measure as possible—for instance, teacher comments across a group of teachers, over the course of multiple marking periods—as the behavior indicator. The problem then lies in the "actionability," in getting the student the right supports in a timely manner, if behavior data are not analyzed and interpreted until the close of each marking period.

" Since we're already doing [behavior interventions] and we're consistently looking at data (e.g., predictive tests, benchmark tests), the mindset is already there. So now DN introduces the tools and the basic framework, and we have the evidence as to why the kid is getting this particular support. It gives more weight to what we're saying."

—Principal

Schools we visited wanted DN to help them fine-tune ways to quantify poor behavior. This conversation is necessarily locally driven by those data elements that are collected and can be feasibly and systematically tracked. It also takes place in the context of schoolwide efforts to create a safe and positive climate for learning. Some schools used EWI tools as a framework to back into, and underscore, the school's approach to behavior supports.

" Behavior is not only very hard to track, but it's also subjective. One thing we've done here is to look at negative behavior comments on report cards. The trouble is, a teacher can write down multiple comments, but only one shows up on the report card. It's hard to know if this comment takes priority [in the teacher's mind]. Suspensions are equally troublesome [to use as a behavior indicator] because the student may've had a bad day." —City Year Corps Member

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT IDENTIFYING STUDENTS:

- Build the Focus List as soon as the data are available. Determine the process by which the list will be initially developed and updated throughout the year.
- Refresh the Focus List after each team meeting; revisit the Focus List at the end of every marking period, and redeploy staff as needed
- Teachers are more engaged in designing student supports when they were involved in the Focus List referral process
- Take time to develop the behavior indicator. Set the indicator and the threshold that is most sensible, but test this assumption by closely examining the impact of attempted interventions. Also consider if the data suggest that whole school or whole classroom rather than individual interventions may be called for.

The EWI Meeting Process

Scheduling the Meeting

In the schools we visited, the EWI meetings are generally held weekly or biweekly for 20-60 minutes. These meetings include the STF, teams of teachers who share a group of students in common, City Year corps members, the Communities in Schools coordinator, and can include school counselors, psychologists, and school administrators. Although the timing of the meeting and the composition of the team vary somewhat from school to school, the goal of the meetings, to share information and data about focus students and to assign interventions, remains the same. We asked team members to comment on their team meetings, asking them for information on the meeting length, attendance, and frequency, team strengths and challenges encountered.

We found that teachers, administrators, and STFs cited common challenges to establishing productive EWI meetings. Ensuring that all team members are able to attend and are engaged is much easier when a common planning time for the teacher team is built into the daily schedule. In one school, meetings became well-attended when they were scheduled during teachers' common preparation period and when teachers were provided nominal monetary compensation to dedicate the prep period to the EWI process. In the absence of a common planning period, organizers found that teachers were distracted in, or did not regularly attend, midday meetings and believed that early morning or after-school meetings were more productive.

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Meeting Facilitation

Attendance and participation also grew when there was clear leadership and skillful facilitation that promoted understanding among team members about the purpose of the meeting, their respective roles, and the meeting process. Facilitators and teachers spoke to the value of using a consistent protocol or framework for the discussion, and capping the amount of time for discussion of any one student at 6–7 minutes. According to respondents, these protocols helped shift meetings from "gripe sessions" dominated by lengthy "storytelling" about a student's poor behavior, to more focused discussions characterized by analysis and action around a range of indicators. Teachers also mentioned the importance of a dedicated space for meetings and, in one school, even spoke to the importance of the seating arrangement—their team was initially scattered in desks throughout a classroom and they described how they became more productive when they switched to sitting around a conference table.

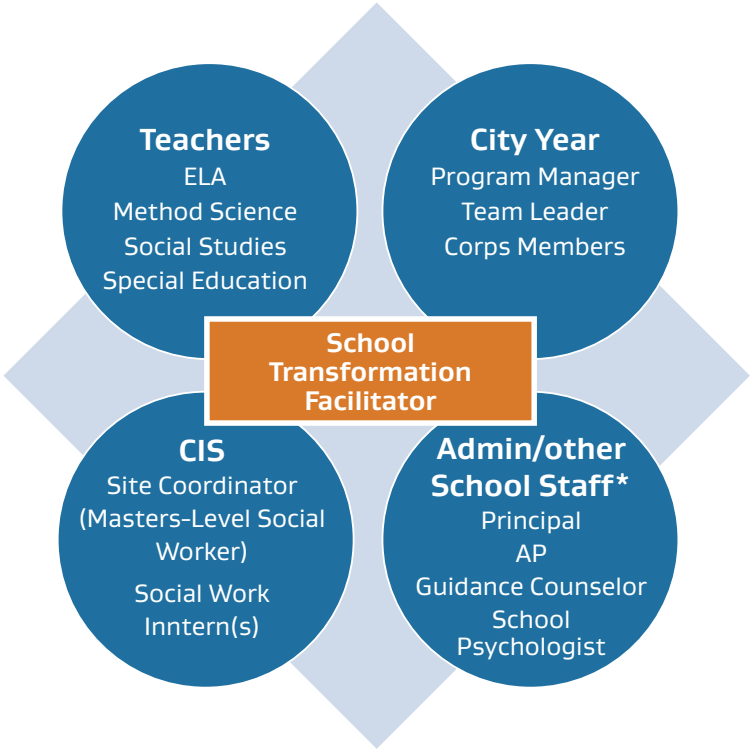
" I keep the meeting moving so that the team doesn't get hung up on the anecdotal. It's hard, because I'm a counselor by training—I've had to retrain myself to break out of that mindset. This way, it's less frustrating for all of us, since we discuss every student we need to, and everyone has a chance to give their input."—STF

Meeting Mechanics

Grade-level teams at Bryant carry out the EWI process in weekly meetings. Each grade-level team meets on a different day for an entire 45-minute period. Teams meet for a common prep period, during which, depending on the grade level, some students are at lunch and others in an elective. The seventh- and eighth-grade teams are large (ten or more staff members each) because they include the core subject teachers for the grade, the grade-level counselor and administrator, and the school-based Diplomas Now staff, STF, City Year team members, and Communities in Schools coordinators and social workers (Figure 1). The sixth grade is much smaller, due to the absence of City Year and CIS support for this team. The fourth- and fifth-grade teams also are small for the same reason. In fact, these grades lay outside the scope of DN's work, but the principal and STF decided to implement team meetings for these grades to build the foundation and establish a school-wide practice among staff to collaboratively monitor student progress before they entered middle school.

At the beginning of the school year, EWI meetings were more open-ended. The team dug deeply into a few students who may have held special interest to certain team members, at the expense of other students. Once the STF was included in the team meetings, this open-ended discussion changed. If a few students begin to dominate the discussion, to the exclusion of others, the STF directs the team to actively recalibrate so that each student gets the coverage s/he merits. While team members may disagree as to what motivates a particular student and why others struggle, interviewees agreed that this can make for healthy discussion and create a learning opportunity, a reflection of each team member's experience.

FIGURE 1: EWI MEETING PARTICIPANTS



In one observed team meeting the STF began by recapping progress on students discussed the previous week, and then shared student EWI data. These data (detailed academic and behavioral data including grades, predictors, benchmarks, referrals, suspensions, interventions to date, and notes) are projected on a screen. The team discussed each in turn, 5-7 minutes apiece. The STF facilitated, prompting with "Strengths?" "Weaknesses?" "Possible Supports?" and guides the EWI team toward consensus on a comprehensive EWI plan for that particular student. The following is an excerpt from the meeting:

Seven students are up on the screen—grades, attendance, predictors, benchmarks, referrals, suspensions, and interventions to date. The EWI team turns to the first student, and the lively conversation begins. The STF mentions that a teacher who could not make today's meeting sent an email about this student. The STF reads from the email:

[Student's name] is capable, and has made progress in math and with coding/ decoding. She's weaker with vocabulary; organizing detail; multi-step problems. She could benefit from individual tutoring.

A teacher nods, and adds: "She needs to be out of this cohort. She's sharp in comparison to the group she's with. She's also kind of boy crazy. . ." Others smile and agree. The CIS site coordinator offers, "She's in a supportive guidance group, and she does rise to the top. She's much more secure than she was coming in." Her ELA teacher contributes: "She's friends with the girls in other cohorts. . ." and her advisory teacher: "Running track really helps her—she's not a morning person. She's lucky she gets me in the morning. This morning, I sent her on an errand. [We] gotta keep her moving." STF interjects with: Possible supports? City Year Team Leader: Let's engage her mother more. Her mother just had a baby, and [student] is afraid of her mom. . . I've heard her say "I can't go home." CIS site coordinator: We've talked about that. Let's get her mom here for parent conference day. STF: Should she continue seeing you (CIS) as well? CIS: Yes.

With four strong partners at Bryant—JHU, City Year, CIS, and the district/school—the STF has worked to clarify and develop norms around how the team works to meet students' needs. The team has decided that City Year, for example, works across all of the EWIs but touches only lightly on behavior, while CIS takes the lead with students with behavior challenges. Partners have been coached to both respectfully assert their views on the proper course of action, and to yield to those with expertise in a given area. Over time, the team is becoming "a well-oiled machine" in the words of one teacher, developing good rapport and a strong focus.

> *"We work in tandem to design intervention strategies, dig to match the intervention plan to the student. No matter what happens, the team must stick together. We cannot have folks splintering off and doing their own thing. Come up with a plan together and revise as you go."*
>
> —8th grade teacher

After each meeting, the STF updates Google docs[4] and emails the Focus List, with enough time (2-3 days) before the next meeting for the group to prepare concise statements about the students. Occasionally the STF distributes a Student Tracker in hard copy showing how each cohort[5] is doing, so that the team can compare cohort performance. If someone misses a meeting, that person can access the team's Google doc (updated every week, it contains data covering the entire school year). Not everyone is comfortable using Google docs, so the STF follows up in person or via email, and some smaller teams (e.g., the sixth grade team) debrief in person. Teachers we interviewed reported a need for tighter protocols around information-sharing, along with basic training on Google docs at the beginning of the school year. At Bryant's weekly Leadership Meetings, the three DN 'leads' (STF, City Year program manager, CIS site coordinator) update the principal on cohort progress and provide an up-to-date copy of the Data Dashboard.

At Tabor, the combined (6th-8th) team carries out the EWI process in bi-weekly meetings during prep period. The meetings were originally held at 7:30 a.m., but not enough people showed up. The team includes core subject teachers, the academic coordinator, and school-based Diplomas Now staff: the STF, City Year team leader, program manager and corps members, and Communities in Schools coordinator/social worker and interns.

The team meets in the designated DN room, which also serves as the City Year office, a partially open meeting room/space adjacent to the library. Team members sit around a square table. At an observed meeting the STF starts with a Focus List and a full class list in front of her. Teachers who teach students on the Focus List sit together. The team discusses 5-7 students, after which teachers break out into grade groups. At the start of the school year, there was a recorder at each table. Toward mid-year, the STF acted as recorder for the whole group; she records data directly onto the Student Tracker. When meetings were cancelled mid-year (weather, test prep, etc), the SIF created and collected Progress Summary sheets from teachers so that the data would not be lost. The STF purposefully steers the conversation toward support (e.g., "What has been done for this student? What do you think has worked?") and away from complaints.

The STF updates the flipchart sheets during the meeting, and keeps those sheets in the DN/City Year office, where there is also a thick

4. Google Docs enables the EQI team to create and share work online and access EWI-related *documents, spreadsheets, presentations, etc* from any computer, anywhere.

5. At Bryant, there are two cohorts in the 6th grade; three in the 7th grade; and three in the 8th grade.

intervention handbook that teachers can search for ideas by risk factor. The STF recaps each meeting and emails the report to all team members, including school administrators who may or may not have attended the meeting. City Year's program manager follows up with teachers who missed the meeting, and teachers fill each other in as well.

At both Highland and Lakeside EWI meetings last from 30-60 minutes, with most meetings about 40 minutes. According to the STF, these meetings are set for 30 minutes, but tend to run over for both schools. The EWI teams, which meet bi-weekly, consist of a teacher team, City Year corps members, a CIS site coordinator, and sometimes a school counselor or administrator. At both schools most team members attend regularly. In a typical meeting at Highland each City Year corps member brings up three Focus List students in his or her cohort to discuss along with any suggestions from the STF. The team teachers approve theses selections before the meeting. Around 8 minutes are spent discussing each student; the STF always facilitates at both schools.

One issue that was brought up at Lakeside was the tendency of teachers to focus on one student with the conversation about that student dominating the meeting. The team eventually realized it needed to agree not to talk about certain students, at least for a time. This will both free time to discuss other students and time for interventions to work. Often, if teachers still would like to discuss one of the previous students, they have a conversation with the STF after a team meeting.

" EWI meetings are a great mechanism because you have not only City Year input, but also [the STF], CIS, and teacher input. They're a great way to hone in on the right indicators. The meetings we've had have been very productive—we discuss how to intervene, things that work, things that don't."

—City Year corps member

Another challenge, brought up by many interviewees, is keeping the conversation productive. At the start of the year, team members related that the conversation was more of what they describe as a "gripe session." At first teachers spent more time venting and "storytelling" than coming up with real solutions. The STF said she can now sense when the team is about to go off-track by the words of team members. During these times she will redirect the group into a more productive discussion. It took time and practice, but eventually the teams have settled into a pace of going from student to

student and being more productive each meeting. According to one interviewee, the expectations and procedures are clear and that has made it easier.

Although having rough patches in the start of the EWI process, teams at both schools agree that they now have input from most team members, communicate well, share information easily, and are solution oriented.

"I have to say we are not going to discuss this student. I may even take them off the list and hide them so the name isn't even there in the folder."—STF

Keeping the Conversation Alive Between EWI Meetings

Pre- and post-meeting work also emerged as vitally important to a successful EWI process. Facilitators said they needed to start anywhere from a full week to at least 48 hours in advance of each EWI meeting to determine which students the team will discuss and why so they can prepare and distribute the data reports and materials necessary for an informed and productive exchange. After the meeting, and before the next one, they also needed to check in with team members responsible for implementing interventions to monitor and track whether the interventions were carried out and how students were responding.

Building Respect and Trust

A final common theme was the importance of building relationships of trust and mutual respect among team members. In one school, City Year volunteers described how they were shy about participating initially because they didn't feel their opinions counted. Teachers also were not clear about the role City Year staff could play in their classrooms or in the team meeting. In other schools, City Year and Communities in Schools were operating as independent programs before their incorporation into Diplomas Now; introducing the EWI process meant a disruption in pre-established roles and routines. These challenges called on facilitators to consciously tend to social dynamics in and between meetings.

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE EWI MEETING PROCESS:

As can be seen from the three school profiles, the meeting process can vary among schools on the frequency and duration of the meetings and the composition of the team members. There are lessons learned, however, across schools that are related frequently in interviews. Below is a list of actions that may be taken to ensure a smooth start to the meeting process.

- Schedule meetings at a time when teachers are consistently able to attend.
- Do not discuss only students with behavior indicators and miss the quietly failing students. Behavior should not dominate the EWI meeting conversation, just because behavior is "what you see first."
- Bring to bear all of the school's resources—guidance counselors, teachers, external partners, social workers, etc.—and use each to the best of your ability.
- Value everyone's opinion. Each team member has the capacity to greatly impact the way all EWI team members do their jobs.
- It's important to share diverse perceptions, and strategies, around a single student.
- Do not let discussion around one student dominate the meeting.
- Keep the meeting focused on information and action rather than griping or storytelling.
- Have student data easily available to all team members either by projecting it on a screen or by printing the information for each team member.

- Cap the amount of time for discussion of any one student to just 6-7 minutes.
- Make sure everyone attends and participates in the meeting.
- Find the best meeting space and arrangement for your team. For example, some team members noted that they found sitting around a large table rather than in desks scattered throughout a room was more productive. Pre- and post-meeting communications and action are just as important as the meetings themselves to a successful EWI process. Members should be encouraged to hold informal conversations between meeting dates to relay new information, check on interventions, or prepare for the next team meeting.
- Build trust and respect among team members by laying ground rules for communications (in-person and on-line), orienting team members to their respective roles (and re-orienting when necessary), instituting regular (monthly and quarterly) reflection on team progress and process, and making time for one-on-one coaching and troubleshooting with team members

EWI Data Systems

The schools we visited represented a wide range of data system capability. One school operated in a district with advanced development of an EWI system with ready access to data through an online portal and, with that, the ability to pull down and customize reports. In another school, the STF spent entire days working alongside the attendance clerk and the special education coordinator to manually enter the data needed for EWI meetings into the school's data dashboard. The district's student information system had not yet come online so the school had to create its own. In all DN schools, a common message was that STFs and EWI teams need to know how to access and manage their own data. For the data to be comprehensible, straightforward, and easy to collect and monitor, all team members must be trained on creating and interpreting student data reports. School administrators and STFs recommended that this aspect of the EWI process be integrated as much as possible with the school's existing data collection and monitoring practice to avoid creating redundant systems.

Most DN schools used two primary data tools: one tool that tracked student risk factors (variously called a Student Tracker or Data Dashboard) and another tool that outlined interventions in the form of a log or plan. Most teams keep their data in an Excel spreadsheet that the STF populates with team- and student-level data that includes variables such as attendance, course performance, behavior, most recent standardized test data, special education designation, candidacy for retention, team notes related to student progress in school, and response to interventions. Intervention Logs/Plans, kept in either Excel or Word, map risks and detail interventions by student.

Nearly all DN schools we visited relied on notebooks or some sort of paper documentation during and between the meetings. Two schools used electronic tools to facilitate team process and communications—namely, meeting announcements, agendas, Focus Lists, Student Trackers, Intervention Logs and other materials are posted on Google docs, and team members consistently sent email related to EWI work. Google docs enabled the team to create and share work online and access EWI-related documents, including spreadsheets and presentations, from any computer. Teachers were encouraged to bring laptops to EWI meetings to access their grade books, because online grade books were only updated eight times per year while the EWI Google docs were updated weekly. The online information helped not only link team members with each other, but also kept all adults who interact with targeted students in the loop, including teachers from special or elective classes who do not participate in the DN team. While convenient, these systems did not completely eliminate the need for paper and in-person communications as not all team members were facile or comfortable with the digital interface and expressed great value in short hallway conversations about students and interventions. Data security also was raised as an ongoing concern, though the systems we observed were all password-protected.

Data Tools

The STF at Bryant created two primary tools to focus the discussion during meetings: 1) Data Dashboard, a bi-weekly student tracker, which shows classroom- and student-level attendance, course performance, most recent standardized test data, special education designation, candidacy for retention, and team notes as to each student's progress this school year; 2) Behavior Intervention Plan, which maps risks and intervention paths by student. An example of a Data Dashboard can be found in Figure 2. About a week before each meeting, the STF gathers and compiles EWI risk and intervention information on each of the Focus List students, and creates the Student Tracker report for the meeting. A couple of days before the meeting, the STF sends out a reminder email to EWI team members,

along with a list of students to be discussed and a preview of Student Tracker data. The STF stressed the need to know who will be discussed and why, about 48 hours before each meeting. That information fuels the weekly recap (intervention attempts, intervention outcomes), which marks the start of each EWI meeting.

Populating the Tools with Data

At Bryant, a huge challenge was access to student data. The STF explained it this way: "DN and [the District] are in a tug-of-war to get the student information system up and running." The STF might spend an entire day manually entering data into the Data Dashboard. She worked closely with the attendance clerk, and also worked alongside the special education coordinator, combing through records. When the student information system comes online, the data are expected to upload with a keystroke. For now, there are kinks.

Before meetings at Highland and Lakeside, the STF consolidates each member's notes from the last meeting to update the master sheets to be used in the next meeting. The STF hands out paper folders at the start of every meeting. These contain information on each Focus List student, including standardized test scores, report card grades, attendance, and unsatisfactory marks for bad behavior. Rounding out this information are the notes submitted by DN team members (e.g., CIS site coordinator) detailing issues with the student, follow-ups, decided actions, and who is "in charge" of implementing each intervention. Also included in the folder is information about those students with EWIs who have not been discussed in recent meetings. The folders are updated between meetings; the master copy is kept in the STF's computer, and she makes sure that 1) any team member who missed a meeting is given a copy of the folder with the updated information; 2) she highlights sections that are particularly useful for the team member (e.g., any interventions that need to be in place during the week in the missing team member's classroom or any phone calls that need to be made). Team members expressed appreciation for this frequent updating of interventions as fuel for a unified front.

The STF at Tabor pulls school progress reports (updated every three weeks) into DN's Student Tracker, used in the meetings. Teachers bring names of students into the meetings as "concerns." The STF pulls the school progress reports and updates the EWI list and intervention information with notes from the previous meeting and from hallway conversations. She puts this information on a large flipchart showing EWIs, Interventions, and Report Card Goals (one student per page).

" Information is very valuable. Not only at the student-level, but it's hard to see trends if data aren't collected regularly. It's hard to notice, otherwise." —Teacher, English/Social Studies

FIGURE 2: EXAMPLE OF DATA DASHBOARD

7th Grade Data Dashboard

EWI Meeting Date 1/26/2011

ATTENDANCE

	ADA YTD	Past Weeks Attendance (wk of 1/24/11)
701	89%	**92%**
702	85%	**88%**

COURSE PERFORMANCE

Section	% Passing Reading,Math (mid quarter)	% Passing Reading, Math (end quarter)
701	82/78%	**87/85%**
702	79/80%	**78/75%**

STUDENT PROGRESS

Student Name	SPED Services	YTDADA	Retention Candidate?	Qrtrly Reading/ Math	DC BAS Reading/ Math	Notes
Student A	N	**79%**	**N**	**83/64**	**70/66**	**Chronic Truant; little parental supervision, Mother has health issues, Point of entry: Saturday Math Pack.**
Student B	N	**90%**	**N**	**79/89**	**77/82**	**Much improvement on homework and class work since given eye exam prescription for glasses. Works well w/CYCM. Motivated to stay for extra help to pull up reading grades.**
Student C	Y	**68%**	**Y**	**66/60**	**63/68**	**Call daily to get her to school, once at school, she does the work. She's especially close with Re-roster so that favorite class is early in day. Her friends and Ms. D. could help with after school involvement.**
Student D	N	**92%**	**N**	**82/91**	**80/96**	**Has trouble focusing in ELA—unlikely to respond to mainstream intervention (eg. Reading Recovery or Read 180), Better candidate for reading across the curriculum. High interest in math and science.**

CONCLUSIONS, EWI DATA SYSTEMS:

- If not already available, invest in developing an electronic data system that enables timely access to up-to-date information on students' background, past achievement, and current attendance, behavior, and course performance. Such systems should minimize time needed for data entry, maximizing time for collaborative analysis and response. If district data systems are lagging, schools may need to create their own shadow systems initially. However, data systems used for EWI ideally are coordinated with school district data systems to avoid costly duplication of time and energy performing basic data entry and report generation.
- While electronic data systems undergird the EWI process, information around interventions may need to be shared electronically, on paper, and verbally to include all team members in meaningful and timely interaction and follow-through: Google docs, discussion in EWI meetings, and informal check-ins between meetings via notes and email were the methods most frequently used.
- Institute a transparent data feedback loop early in the school year that is updated constantly to prevent being "held hostage" by the lack of access to, or delay in, data.
- Ensure that appropriate data reports are in the hands of team members before each meeting, and as requested between meetings.

Interventions and Follow-Up

One of the most exciting aspects of EWI for those we interviewed was the opportunity to collectively and immediately respond to students' needs. The process enables teams to take evidence-based interventions (such as tutoring or counseling) and customize them so they address the specific problem behaviors of particular students and, as much as possible, the root causes of those problems. The challenge, however, is that the intervention part of the EWI process is inherently a social and creative process, and still a relatively uncharted one at that. While research points to the effectiveness of some interventions in general, it offers little specific guidance on "the right intervention for the right student at the right time." Even in one school where the eighth-grade team had worked together for more than a decade and had identified a host of academic interventions for students, teachers described the team as "continually brainstorming and coming up with new ways to help students," especially with the addition of City Year and CIS support.

Identifying and integrating the different support offered by each team member were both stimulating and challenging, according to those we interviewed. Each team partner came with his or her own "bag of tricks," but it took time to learn from each other during EWI meetings how best to weave those into an integrated whole. It helped for team members to have a set of interventions linked to their role and expertise. Teachers and academic counselors, for example, were generally expected to provide

" Attendance and lateness is a huge focus for our principal, so we started a VIP lounge on Wednesday mornings for those kids who over the past week had no absences and no tardies. We have video games, board games, music, and make pancakes. The kids love it." —City Year Team Leader

traditional interventions such as adapting the seating arrangements, calling home or meeting with parents about grades, using positive reinforcements in class, tracking classwork and homework, and detentions. The teams looked to City Year corps members to provide mentoring through daily conversations with students, group and one-on–one tutoring, behavior coaching, and afterschool enrichment programs. Mental health counseling, social service coordination, and referrals for more intensive community-based assistance fell to Communities in Schools staff. In their best moments, teams became rich and responsive learning communities where inspiration to create or adopt new interventions happened both during, and outside of, team time.

Intervening at the Classroom Level

" I've done it all, from phone calls home, inviting parents in, talking to kids one-on-one, I've even brought in clothing and things for my kids."—Teacher

Within EWI response systems, classroom level interventions organized and led by teachers, play a key role in preventing students from developing off-track indicators, especially when done in a consistent fashion across classrooms. At Lakeside, class failures are rarely examined because students are generally not allowed to fail. If students do not master the material, they are automatically re-taught. One teacher on the team will take the students who have not mastered the skill and provide more review and practice, while the other teacher will take the students who have mastered the skill and give them other work to complete. This particular teacher team worked together and bonded the previous year, so the EWI discussion came quite naturally. They believe communication is the key to a good meeting.

" We invited the student's mother into the classroom; she sat in on classes until she felt as though [her daughter] was heading in the right direction. She was here so much, we were about to cut her a check."—Teacher

The Bryant teachers we interviewed "start early," spending the opening weeks of school covering routines, procedures, and rules to set the tone and to make it easier to uncover academic issues. An example of an afterschool program that teachers use for students who are struggling is Power Hour, held late in the day (4:30/5 p.m.). Teachers have run into little to no opposition from parents. "When it's time to go home, they [students] don't want to leave." Teachers report that "having the [EWI] data" really helps in parent meetings, to give context to and to provide evidence of the student's issues.

For behavior, some teachers at Mabry create their own Discipline Plans. The teacher may talk to the student first, either at lunch or after school, then invite a parent into the classroom or hold a parent conference if necessary. If a teacher-led intervention does not seem to be working, that

teacher will present the situation at the next EWI meeting. Here, teachers might share best practices and suggest alternative ways to help that student.

"The easiest place to see movement is in behavior—once you build rapport with a student you see a completely changed attitude. When you're in the classroom helping that student, s/he will sit up and pay attention. There are a hundred social cues—the kid will brighten up, even ask where [a Corps Member] has been."

—CY Team Leader

For academics at Mabry, some interventions have been "institutionalized" over the years. Rocket Time (Tuesday/Thursday during 3rd period) is a 45-minute math block. Every teacher teaches math (the math department generates the lessons). There's also science, writing (Wednesday mornings) and reading (Tuesday mornings). Other interventions are homegrown: one teacher creates literacy peer groups in class, shifting the makeup of the groups so that students do not get accustomed to working with the same people. Another teacher uses manipulatives to help groups of six students grasp an idea (during Rocket Time, for instance). During department meetings, teachers share information about academic progress. Yet another teacher pulls his own groups to target particular issues. Here's one veteran teacher's approach to content delivery:

I use History Alive as an instructional delivery method. It's hands-on, process-oriented. If I used worksheets, [my] kids would kill me. The same with textbooks. Must tie class work to personal lives, find relevant examples. Get kids invested in what they're creating as a new product. My class may be more chaotic than others, but it comes out in the scores.

—Teacher, eighth-grade social studies

Expanding and Fine Tuning Interventions

Another key theme from the site visits is that EWI response teams are constantly increasing their interventions and fine tuning the ones they have. Teams strive toward the ideal of providing

the right intervention, to the right student, at the right time. There have been multiple efforts by the teams at both Highland and Lakeside to create a diverse set of interventions. Team members at Lakeside noted they lack new strategies so they are consulting others and doing their own research. They are using a book called, *Love and Logic*, to find solutions. The whole team is also working on what it calls an intervention "cube," which is a generated list of targeted interventions for students showing each of the early warning indicators. On the cube there are interventions for students with poor attendance, behavior issues, and poor performance in math and English. At both schools the STF has also implemented a City Year behavior captain whose job is to help other corps members decide on interventions for their students. The behavior captain uses the manuals and flip-charts and advises the other members.

The kids taking advantage of the afterschool program are definitely benefitting, their grades are up and they are more engaged.

—City Year corps member

Throughout the school year, DN partners at Bryant will predictably find that some interventions work well for certain students, not so well for others. An example is an attendance intervention City Year has found helpful in some situations. A City Year corps member sits down with a student to say, *you've been out three times this week. Is there something we can do to help? In-class support, lunch club, tutoring, boys and girls group? Or is it a quick move to the front of the classroom?* City Year also holds a Lunch Club (e.g., 50 Acts of Leadership, a behavior-focused lunchtime support). At Bryant, City Year has found this to work best with a mix of on- and off-track students. Ideally, clubs and extracurricular activities are set up at the beginning of the year. If students aren't showing up, City Year might drop certain activities and add others.

Using External Partners to Diversify and Scale Interventions

In each of the schools visited for this report, the DN reform initiative strategically integrates two external student support organizations, City Year and Communities in Schools. These partners address the issue of scale by increasing the number of students who can be given ongoing support to get back on track or stay on track. They also address the issue of scope by enabling the highest-need students to get professionally case managed supports, while marshaling the power of near peers to provide students with direct role models. The lessons learned through the experience of these partners performing these functions can more broadly inform efforts by schools to recruit and integrate external partners into the EWI response system.

City Year corps members at Tabor identify those kids who may need a little more support, and accommodate them first. Through ongoing conversation, corps members will determine whether to hold one-on-one or small group tutoring sessions, pullouts, behavior coaching, and/or attendance check-ins. To this end, City

" City Year works at ground level and has more of a sense of 'what's going on' with students. A corps member can jump right in and work with students, or else refer those who need more intensive support. They're in the classroom, alongside students, providing routine encouragement. They make sure students stay on task, help with goal-setting, and ensure that students take education seriously and understand how it impacts their future. The proximity in age makes it easier for [City Year] to get through to kids." —School Principal

Year's team leader holds weekly check-ins with corps members around Focus List student interventions. The corps members fill out weekly DN surveys detailing the date, type, and duration of intervention by student. The program manager reviews these with corps members.

City Year corps members at Tabor also group targeted students by need. For example, they pull together sixth-graders who struggle with math and English one day/week during a prep period. They also target boys with academic and behavior issues by giving them leadership responsibilities to help them engage in school. They may ask the boys, for example, to run a BrainTeaser of the Week for the entire school, and City Year and the STF will follow up.

At Mabry the majority of City Year's 'go-to' interventions were in place from 2009-10, the first year the school had DN. For relatively minor attendance and behavior issues, City Year is big on clubs—Morning Clubs, Lunch Clubs, an ESL Club, a Games Club that targets chronically absent kids, and a Sports Club. For academics, City Year provides redirection, positive reinforcement, small group tutoring, homework help, and one-to-one mentoring. The City Year team leader created a Teacher Check-In Tracker to monitor the work of the corps members. This tracker covers: How is City Year doing in the classroom? Are corps members helping the right students?

At both Highland and Lakeside the role of the City Year corps members includes observing and helping students with work during class and providing afterschool tutoring. In addition Highland corps members indicated that they help students:

- get caught up on classwork during lunchtime;
- cue students to calm down when they seem to be getting excited;
- provide City Year dollars that students can use to buy inexpensive prizes;
- give extra-credit to students who show up to afterschool tutoring, and
- head up the 50 acts of leadership that encourage students to keep daily logs of their positive acts.

Both schools have noticed improvements in Focus List students. Most have observed the students working harder in class and being more self-confident. Unsatisfactory grades on report cards and negative remarks from teachers have also decreased over the year.

" One of my students started out the year doing really badly in math. He would not get it and we would have to go over 2 or 3 examples. Now I show him once and he can do it and is getting the work easily."—City Year corps member

In the beginning of the school year at Mabry, the CIS site coordinator prepares a Campus Behavior Plan, which is then approved by the principal and the academic coordinator. From that plan, it is decided which group(s) of kids CIS will work with (e.g., is there a need for a high school readiness group for over-aged eighth-graders?). The biggest challenge for CIS is finding the time to hold groups, since the school day shrunk from nine to eight periods. Groups can be held either at lunch (although students do not like to miss social time) or during an elective (if and only if all of the students in the group have the same elective). The social worker forms groups throughout the year: examples are Men Who Dream; ROPES (Reality-Oriented Physical Experiences); Problem-solving; Team-building; Asking for Help; Why Try? Alcohol and Drug Prevention; and Mi Carera (My Career). During our visit, a reading group, Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul, was meeting.

If a student with a behavior issue at Mabry also has an attendance problem, CIS takes a whole-child approach and "tackles whatever is keeping the child from school" (e.g., alarm clock, transportation). Often the social worker will draft an Incentive Plan for the student; students with more intensive needs may require an Anger Management Plan. Overall, CIS uses counseling and case management practices to influence student decision-making.

Both Highland and Lakeside CIS coordinators seem enthusiastic about hosting parent workshops and training. The CIS coordinator at Highland in particular mentioned workshops about providing consequences at home and bullying. In one observation of an EWI team meeting, the group discussed how to set up a parenting workshop on the importance of homework and study tips to support their child's homework completion. Both CIS coordinators also work with community-based organizations to access interventions for students.

At Bryant the CIS approach to each student is as an opportunity to assess the root problem behind the EWI, which according to the CIS site coordinator can, at times, be identified from just a few minutes of one-on-one chatting with the student. If a student comes up in an EWI meeting, the CIS site coordinator will try to track that student down that afternoon for a quick check-in. He or she will explain that adults are concerned and have ideas about what might help the student stay on board. This conversation will unveil whether that student will work well individually, with a group, or with family members. The next step is to debrief with

" The great thing about designing interventions for these kids is that we all (City Year, teachers, STF, CIS) take best practices advice from each other. We try new [interventions] if we notice that something isn't working—because of the meetings, we notice this pretty quickly. Sometimes it surprises us—what works and what doesn't work."

—City Year corps member

a family member and solicit ideas. The CIS site coordinator will approach the conversation in a non-threatening, collaborative way: I spoke with your son today, here are some things I offered, may I have permission to work with him?

" Some groups are bigger because we have two adults to co-facilitate. For example, YWCA facilitates Mi Carera, which is fantastic, because she [YWCA staff member] speaks their language—both literally and figuratively!"—CIS Site Coordinator

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT INTERVENTIONS:

The previous school profiles highlighted the individuality and uniqueness of schools in identifying and administering interventions. Below is an example of advice from staff members from all the schools as to how to make the intervention assignments easier and more effective.

- Seek new interventions by reading books and talking with other educators and counselors.
- Try new interventions for students who, after a set period of time, have not shown improvement.
- Implement both classroom-wide and individual interventions such as afterschool tutoring, as well as group interventions, such as clubs, for students with similar warning indicators.
- Do not forget about positive incentives and reinforcement.
- Attempt to get parents involved in interventions by inviting them to the school to observe, keeping them informed of the behavior of their child, and by holding information sessions for parents to better support their children in their schoolwork.
- Do keep track of which team member was assigned to which intervention so that the team can check on progress.

Reflections on Implementation and Next Steps for Research

School-based teams of adults focused on understanding and meeting student needs are not a new concept. States and districts have long used Title I and other funds to create "student support teams" charged with providing extra help to struggling students, especially those challenged by learning disabilities and/or disruptive and under-resourced home environments. What distinguishes the early warning systems (EWS) approach described here is that it is not an "add on" designed to support a sub-group of students, e.g. the lowest-achieving quartile. The EWS instead involves all school-based (and some community-based) adults in a new standard of practice that embeds data, reflection, and collaboration into the daily operation of the school to fulfill its mission of meeting the needs of every student, not just a select few.

This report offers a first school-level look at how early warning systems are being implemented. Because it is a new practice that requires integration of multiple partners with each other and into the daily life in the schools, it is not surprising that the practitioners we interviewed and observed encountered challenges. Our findings point to areas that external developers, facilitators, and school-based staff must pay close attention to as they start up and work to sustain their school-reform efforts—training, securing buy-in, on-site facilitation/coordination, tending to both the social and technical aspects of the team process, balancing structure and creativity. In hindsight, many of the lessons learned from these "early adopters" may seem like common sense. But, without their guidance, future efforts are more likely to struggle with the same challenges to implementing data-driven collaborative response teams.

By focusing this study on implementation, we are implicitly arguing that investigating how and why a reform works is just as important as studying whether it works. We are, of course, pleased to report that EWI team members across all the schools we visited noticed improvements in attendance, behavior, and course performance for the students on their Focus Lists. Students were more likely to pay attention and try in class, demonstrate heightened self-confidence, and were less likely to get into fights with other students as a result of a targeted intervention such as tutoring or participating in an after-school program. Teachers in several schools reported a dramatic turnaround in behavior and performance of some students. After intervention these students were not receiving as many

referrals, not acting out, and showing much more self-control. Upward trends in these key student outcomes have been systematically documented in these and other schools in the DN network, and rigorous independent evaluation of the impact of Diplomas Now is underway (see the Everyone Graduates Center website *www.every1graduates.org* and the Diplomas Now website *www.diplomasnow.org*).

Yet, as EWI practice expands, it runs the risk of failing to achieve strong and sustained improvement in student outcomes if schools are not informed about how to implement the practices needed to produce that improvement. This report only begins to document the challenges and barriers schools faced and the steps they are taking to overcome them. Further research and development is needed. For example, while the schools we observed were not lacking in data, they did not all have an electronic system that enabled them to easily integrate different sources of data and generate the reports they needed in a timely fashion. Schools also struggled with establishing a reliable indicator for behavior to use in their EWI process.

Finally, interventions emerged as an area especially in need of further investigation. In current practice, matching the right intervention to the right student at the right time remains far more art than science. There is limited evidence-based guidance for teams on which interventions work best for students who are presenting a given set of early warning signs. Also, little is known about what interventions are most feasible, especially in light of budget cuts and a growing population of students struggling in unstable homes and communities.

Early warning systems hold the promise of becoming powerful tools in identifying and meeting the needs of all students. These systems are still in their early stages of development, calling on researchers and practitioners to work together to learn how they can be best implemented to put and keep students on track to graduation and success in college, career, and civic life.

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WHO WE ARE

Everyone Graduates Center

The Everyone Graduates Center at the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University seeks to identify the barriers that stand in the way of all students graduating from high school prepared for adult success, to develop strategic solutions to overcome the barriers, and to build local capacity to implement and sustain them. For more information, please visit **www.every1graduates.org**

Philadelphia Education Fund

The Philadelphia Education Fund is a member of the Public Education Network, advancing the mission of improving the quality of public education in Philadelphia and the region so that youth are prepared for college and careers. The Ed Fund plays an integral role in education research and reform and served as a lead partner for Diplomas Now in Philadelphia. **www.philaedfund.org**

Diplomas Now

Diplomas Now is a proven approach that helps the most-challenged middle and high schools in America's largest cities ensure that students graduate ready for college or career. It is the first fully integrated approach that improves a school's curriculum and instruction while providing the right students with the right support at the right time. Diplomas Now is a collaboration of three national nonprofits: Talent Development Secondary at the Johns Hopkins University School of Education, City Year and Communities In Schools. **www.diplomasnow.org**

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