



An overview of the metrics of the ALC Plus program

Executive Summary

A P R I L 2 0 1 4

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An overview of the metrics of the ALC Plus program report provides an analysis and evaluation of the Alternative Learning Center (ALC) Plus program. The ALC Plus program was designed to serve students who are involved in the county and who are not regularly attending school (typically because of excessive truancy) or who need to enroll in a new school following a county placement or stay in a correctional facility. The program is based on an alternative education program integrated with a wide array of enriched programming, mental and chemical health, correctional, and social supports to meet the needs of youth in grades 7-12 who qualify for the program and their families. County-involved students are referred by juvenile probation, human services (mental health and foster care), and the be@school program.

The evaluation includes the analysis of ALC Plus program data, academic information, recidivism and out of home placement data, staff focus groups and partner surveys. These methods were selected to gather both qualitative and quantitative data, in order to capture the outcomes of the program.

Results of the evaluation demonstrate the four primary goals of the program were successfully addressed, as highlighted below:

1. ***Goal of increasing attendance:*** Over half (56%) students attendance improved once they became part of the ALC Plus program. While none of students had attendance rates higher than 85% before enrolling in ALC Plus, one in five students attended school at least 85% of the time once enrolled in the program. Almost all (96%) of the referring partners reported that their ALC Plus enrolled clients increased attendance while enrolled in ALC Plus.
2. ***Goal of graduating or earning credits:*** Over half (56%) of students earned at least 50% of the credits they attempted. Statistical analyses indicated that percentage of credits earned was positively associated with attendance rates, with higher attendance rates correlating to greater percentage of credits earned. Two in three referring agencies reported that their clients obtained adequate credits while enrolled in ALC Plus.

3. **Goal of reducing school placements:** Nearly two of every three students (63%) who were referred to the program were enrolled in NEC or SEC and a third (30%) of those enrolled remained in the program for more than one school year. Nearly all (88%) of referring partners felt that their ALC Plus enrolled clients tend to do better in school than before they were enrolled in ALC Plus.
4. **Goal of obtaining skills or a GED:** Students seem to become more engaged the more time that they spend in the program (e.g., an increase in the numbers of completion in certification programs). Additionally, three-quarters (73%) of referring partners stated that participating in vocational or certificate programming was "moderately" or "extremely helpful" for their clients.

Of those partners who participated in the focus groups or completed the surveys, most felt the ALC Plus program works well for the students they refer. Without ALC Plus, some felt these youth might not be in school at all. Additionally, it was expressed that the ALC Plus program brings together kids that may not "play well" in other settings.

The report has a few additional findings including the *value of providing transportation*, one of the core elements in the ALC Plus program. It can be argued that access to transportation is critical and possibly one of the main reasons for increased attendance. Additionally, the *necessity of having a one-stop shop that provides supports* to program participants appears to be critical to reaching the goal of keeping students in school. In addition to transportation, these supports include system navigation to help county staff match their students to the most appropriate school setting, , one-on-one case coordination to ensure regular communication between the school, county workers, and families, on-site mental health and chemical dependency counseling, and access to vocational certification programs.

The report also underscores the *importance of partners and funders having realistic expectations of academic growth*. Many of the ALC Plus students face barriers (e.g., juvenile justice involvement, history of truancy, out-of-home placement, behavioral difficulties, and chemical dependency) that interfere with their academic lives and may have caused them to fall behind in school in the past. While the program is well-equipped to provide additional supports to get them on track so they do not fall further behind, it is unrealistic to assume that students will be able to quickly make-up for lost academic credits.

Some of the limits of the analysis include the complexity of collecting (and reporting) some of the data that current funders and partners are seeking. The process for tracking data is time consuming and at times has been difficult due to the various capabilities of stakeholders. Currently, there are no standards about how students' credits are collected and/or reported from school to school or district to district. Additionally, data are stored in many different systems and some of the data are not readily available electronically (i.e., pre-enrollment attendance, credits and behavior data), so requires extra time spent tracking down member district staff. Much of the data collection responsibility falls on program staff.

Subsequent evaluations should consider building more formalized data collection processes, such as developing a standard "member district form" to collect more consistent data about students referred to the ALC Plus program. Additionally, planning to interview youth who are in the program, as well as their parents, to get their sense of satisfaction and perceptions of academic accomplishments, may be helpful in further assessing the success of the program.