



# Diploma On! Program

*An Overview of the Metrics*

**M A Y 2 0 1 5**

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# Acknowledgments

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For any further questions about Diploma On! contact Alexia Poppy-Finley, 952-374-5786, [aafinley@district287.org](mailto:aafinley@district287.org).

# Background

In spring of 2012 Diploma On! was developed as part of the Achieving Graduation by Reducing Achievement Disparities (A-GRAD) initiative to reduce the dropout rate in Hennepin County and in response to Hennepin County public school superintendents' concern with increasing dropout rates. Diploma On! is coordinated by a social worker from District 287 with Local Collaborative Time Study (LCTS) funds allocated by District 287 through its member districts.

The following districts<sup>1</sup> volunteered to be a part of Diploma On! (date of involvement):

1. Brooklyn Center (April 2012)
2. Eden Prairie (October 2013)
3. Hopkins (September 2012)
4. Mound/Westonka (December 2013)
5. Orono (May 2015)
6. Osseo (December 2012)
7. Richfield (October 2013)
8. Robbinsdale (October 2013)
9. St. Louis Park (April 2012)
10. Wayzata (October 2013)

The purpose of Diploma On! is to re-engage students who have dropped out of any of these school districts and ultimately increase Hennepin County graduation rates. The social worker also serves as a coordinator and obtains contact information for students who have dropped out of school. Often these students are part of the schools' "15 day drop list" and are identified by staff within each district. The coordinator then seeks out the student and/or caregiver to try and establish a contact and build a relationship with the student in order to re-enroll them in a program or school that fits their needs.

From its inception, Diploma On! received 306 total referrals. See the Appendix for additional information about the students who were referred.

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<sup>1</sup> District 287 referred 52 students to Diploma On! The referrals from District 287 came from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) four-year and five-year drop list from three Alternative Learning Center (ALC) programs.

## Project accomplishments

The primary goals for the first year of Diploma On! were to develop a team, relationships, and a referral process within each school district involved. The purpose of the program is to build relationships and awareness of resources within each community that result in better services for students and their families, and to increase graduation rates in Hennepin County.

The project achieved the following objectives to date:

- Developed the project brochure
- Created data collections spreadsheet and digital intake form
- Identified teams to collaborate with at ten referring school districts
- Connected educational, mental health, chemical health, and other social service providers within each community
- Identified system and community barriers preventing young adults from completing high school
- Increased member districts' awareness of the number of 15-day drops and increased the identification system within each district
- Provided support to community agencies around the navigation of educational systems and options for youth
- Added the four ALC sites within Intermediate District 287: Gateway, South Education Center Academy, North Education Center Academy, and W-Alt (West Alternative)
- Partnered with the Minnesota Visiting Nursing Association (MVNA) and Bloomington Public Health to increase awareness of school options for pregnant and parenting teens that receive MFIP and have dropped out of high school

Diploma On! has been helpful in supporting school personnel, students, and caregivers. The coordinator has reached out to students and offers a variety of services: resource and referrals (teen parents, chemical health treatment/assessment, mental health, GED services, parental support, job application support, etc.), connecting student with assessment/treatment, locating an appropriate school environment to fit their educational and social emotional needs, re-enrolling them within their home district, and acting as a sounding board and support for students, caregivers, and school staff.

For example, the Diploma On! coordinator assists students in reconnecting with their home district by reducing communication errors (helping students and families understand what may have taken place at school prior to the student dropping out) and addressing barriers within the district. The coordinator also connected several students with GED services and/or Area Learning Centers within their area.

Specifically for parents/caregivers, the Diploma On! coordinator offers a sense of hope, educational options, a caring person, and helps to reduce barriers. For the schools, Diploma On! provides extra support for staff in consultation on high-risk students who have not been successful in their school. They also think creatively about options for students within or outside of their district and provide direct service by reaching out to students when other staff may not have the time or resources to do so.

Many districts and/or staff do not have the time to provide direct resource and referral (warm hand off vs. giving phone number/card and having the family take the initiative). With less and less student support resources, staff appreciate a person being designated to work one-on-one with families/students to help reduce barriers and get students back into school.

### **A success story**

One student who has been referred to Diploma On! and is receiving services is a 16-year-old Hispanic female, who receives both IEP and ELL educational services. She suffers from depression and anxiety, has been to three different schools, and is more than a year behind in school (based on credits). In the past, she attempted both high school and alternative school. Additionally, she does not have transportation to get to school and does not have a connection to or relationship with a staff person within her home district.

The student began working with Diploma On! in April 2013 (including summer) and she has remained enrolled in her district home high school since that time. She receives mental health support within school, attends weekly check-ins that have graduated to bi-weekly check-ins, and participates in a Latino girls group in her school. Also, she has improved her attendance, and plans to attend Transitions Plus in the Fall to continue to work on her independent living skills before receiving her diploma. Although she continues to have ups and downs with her depression and struggles attendance, she remains engaged in school and feels supported and hopeful about her future.

### **Recommendations for enhancing Diploma On!**

There have been recurring barriers impacting students' ability to be enrolled in school. These barriers include mental health issues, chemical health concerns, lack of

transportation, living in poverty, motivation to continue in school, need to work and support themselves or their family, and the stigma a student experiences when leaving school. In order to decrease the number of students that drop out of school, Diploma On! should consider the following:

- Communicate and learn from other programs in the community and school to coordinate efforts working with students and their families.
- Increase time devoted to incorporating Check and Connect model for Diploma On!
- Develop a strategy for addressing transportation resources for students to attend school.
- Provide more prevention services within schools to look at creative options for students prior to them being credit deficient and dropping out.
- Develop a strategy for increasing the prioritizing and timeliness of referrals from districts to the Diploma On! program.
- Develop a coordinated strategy for teen parents who require daycare in a neighborhood setting when choosing to attend a school that does not offer daycare (including transporting the child to daycare if parent is transported to school).
- Provide more infant and daycare slots for teen parents in their communities, especially if School Based Early Learning Centers are at capacity and no other programs are available.
- Increase number of staff to have more than one coordinator to support more intensive work with district, students, and families for both external and internal schools.

# Appendix

## Demographics and referral information for students referred through May 26, 2015.

<b>Table 1. Number of referred students</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
# Of referred students SY11-12	37	12%
# Of referred students SY12-13	109	36%
# Of referred students SY13-14	90	29%
# Of referred students SY14-15	70	23%
<b>Total</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>100%</b>

<b>Table 2. Student gender</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	149	49%
Female	152	50%
Transgender	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>98%</b>

**Note:** When totals are less than 100%, it signifies missing data.

<b>Table 3. Student race</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
American Indian/Alaskan Native	3	1%
Asian	13	4%
Black/African American	95	31%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	0%
White	64	21%
Bi/multiracial	12	4%
Other	48	16%
Unknown	1	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>77%</b>

**Note:** When totals are less than 100%, it signifies missing data.

<b>Table 4. Student ethnicity</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Non-Latino/Hispanic	182	59%
Latino/Hispanic	60	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>79%</b>

**Note:** When totals are less than 100%, it signifies missing data.



<b>Table 5. Barriers at intake</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Chemical/Mental health issues	110	36%
Transportation	75	25%
Unstable housing	33	11%
Pregnancy/Teen mom	27	9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>80%</b>

**Note:** When totals are less than 100%, it signifies missing data.

<b>Table 6. Referral district</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Brooklyn Center	65	21%
Eden Prairie	7	2%
Hopkins	41	13%
ISD 287	52	17%
Mound Westonka	1	0%
Osseo	57	19%
Other	1	0%
Richfield	2	1%
Robbinsdale	4	1%
St. Louis Park	67	22%
Wayzata	8	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>100%</b>

<b>Table 7. Grade at intake</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
7	2	1%
8	2	1%
9	13	4%
10	41	13%
11	67	22%
12	115	38%
12+	37	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>91%</b>

**Note:** When totals are less than 100%, it signifies missing data.

<b>Table 8. Estimated time to graduate at intake</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than 1 school year	35	11%
1 school year	33	11%
More than one school year	210	69%
<b>Total</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>91%</b>

**Note:** When totals are less than 100%, it signifies missing data.

<b>Table 9. Referral source</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Guidance counselor	103	34%
Social worker	93	30%
Principal/dean	48	16%
Other	9	3%
Self	2	1%
Student Support Specialist	2	1%
Parent/caregiver	1	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>84%</b>

**Note:** When totals are less than 100%, it signifies missing data.

<b>Table 10. Status at intake</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Dropped out of school	259	85%
High Risk	45	15%
<b>Total</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>99%</b>

**Note:** When totals are less than 100%, it signifies missing data.

<b>Table 11. Educational placement at intake for SY14-15 students</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
General Education	208	68%
Special Education	43	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Note:** When totals are less than 100%, it signifies missing data.

<b>Table 12. English as second language</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
No	226	74%
Yes	27	9%
Unknown	48	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>98%</b>

**Note:** When totals are less than 100%, it signifies missing data.

<b>Table 13. Expulsion history</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
No	218	71%
Yes	5	2%
Unknown	80	26%
<b>Total</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>99%</b>

**Note:** When totals are less than 100%, it signifies missing data.

<b>Table 14. Reasons for discharge</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Re-enrolled	23	26%
Moved	20	22%
Unable to contact	19	21%
Declined services	18	20%
Graduated	7	8%
Placed out of home	2	2%
Incarcerated	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100%</b>