Graduation Alliance Dropout Recovery Program
Mission Measurement & Impact Genome Research Brief

Completed by
Brock Auerbach-Lynn, Senior Manager
Emalee Pearson, Consultant

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Background

Graduation Alliance's Dropout Recovery Program aims to support school-aged youth and young adults who have left high school without a diploma to earn an accredited high school diploma or re-enter high school on track to graduate. The program is delivered in an online setting coupled with outreach and enrollment, transcript analysis, Wi-Fi-enabled laptops, coaching and mentoring, and robust support services. The high-risk individuals served by this program are provided with intensive human support including proactive academic interventions, local advocacy to address life barriers, 24/7 tutoring, and dedicated math assistance.

As Graduation Alliance looks to scale its Dropout Recovery Program across the United States, the organization seeks to verify program impact, benchmark performance against other similar programs, and identify effective district-level strategies to prioritize for maximum impact going forward.

Mission Measurement, a social impact data and strategy firm, completed the project. Mission Measurement is a leader in outcomes-based measurement and has built the Impact Genome – the largest database of what works in the social sector. The Impact Genome helps standardize the social impact sector through the development of taxonomies of evidence-based outcomes and program strategies/core components derived from tens of thousands of published evaluations and research studies that have been coded and analyzed. Through standardization, the Impact Genome helps social impact funders and service providers to understand the impact they achieve and why. Standardization also enabled the development of sector-wide efficacy and cost per outcome benchmarks that help drive a more data-informed social impact field.

To complete this analysis Mission Measurement reviewed the Graduation Alliance Dropout Recovery Program student data collected from October 2017 – February 2020. This dataset ultimately included 7,796 students from 135 districts. Students were included in the analysis if they had any recorded program exit-reason (outcome). The Mission Measurement team reviewed existing student-level data for the Dropout Recovery districts, cleaning the data as needed throughout the analysis process. Student outcome data and beneficiary characteristics were supplemented by additional data collection from Graduation Alliance's local advocates on the specific program strategies/core components used by each district – and which strategies/components were most important to program success. The datasets were combined to deliver a comprehensive understanding of impact, see variations in performance across the districts (Portfolio Summary), and opportunities for continued optimization of program design and support.

Approach and Findings

To assess the impact of the Graduation Alliance Dropout Recovery Program, Mission Measurement analyzed data at three levels: (1) entire program; (2) district level and (3) beneficiary level. This approach enabled an understanding of the program's overall performance

and comparison to Impact Genome benchmarks, a district level assessment to understand variety in program design and impact, and performance among different beneficiary groups.

In concert with Graduation Alliance, Mission Measurement aligned existing impact data with the Impact Genome's High School Completion outcome (ID Z06.05.01) from the College and Career Readiness Genome. This outcome measures impact for programs designed to reach students still in school and students who have exited school. To more precisely benchmark Dropout Recovery Program performance, Mission Measurement isolated the High School Completion outcome efficacy rate and cost per outcome benchmarks from programs targeting similar beneficiary groups as Graduation Alliance. This isolation enabled a more parallel impact comparison.

During the analysis period (October 2017 – February 2020), Graduation Alliance's Dropout Recovery Program reached 7,796 students. Among these, 3,616 students achieved the desired outcome (as designated by Graduation or Back in School exit reasons) yielding a 46.3% efficacy rate. From this data, the average cost for the Dropout Recovery Program to achieve a successful outcome is $8,423.

Summary of Mission Measurement analysis:

- Reach: **7,796** (total # of students served across all districts)
- Primary Outcome: **High School Completion**
- Beneficiaries to Achieve Outcome: **3,616** (as demonstrated by total number of students across all districts with Exit Type: (1) Back to School (In-District) or (2) Graduated)
- Overall Program Efficacy: **46%**
- Overall Cost-Per-Outcome: **$8,423**

The Impact Genome benchmark for dropout recovery-type programs like Graduation Alliance:

- Benchmark efficacy rate is **36%**
- Benchmark cost per outcome is **$12,504**

Graduation Alliance's Dropout Recovery Program beats the benchmark for both.

The district level analysis demonstrates 73% of 135 districts exceed the efficacy rate benchmark and 78% of these districts demonstrate a lower cost per outcome than the benchmark. Still there were significant variations in district performance and costs: efficacy rates varied between 0–100% and cost per outcome varied between $550-$49,000.

The remainder of this research brief provides insight into how Dropout Recovery Program performance varied by beneficiary demographics and program design/type. The brief concludes with an analysis of the program strategies/core components most common among high efficacy programs.

Detailed Analysis

Efficacy and CPO Analysis by Beneficiary Race/Ethnicity

Summary of Findings: Among Dropout Recovery Program participants for whom race/ethnicity data are available (2,261), over half (51%) identify as white or Caucasian, 26% identify as Hispanic or Latino and 13% identify as Black or African American. Just 5% of students identify as more than one race, and 4% of students identify as Asian, Native American/American Indian/Alaskan Native, or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. Among students with successful outcomes, Asian students had the highest efficacy rate (55%), and Hispanic or Latino students had the lowest efficacy rate (35%). Conversely, Hispanic or Latino Students had the highest Cost-Per-Outcome ($12,098) while Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander students had the lowest CPO ($6,860).

Table 1: Race/Ethnicity of All Students		
Race/Ethnicity	**# Students**	**% Total**
Asian	51	2%
Black or African American	305	13%
Hispanic or Latino	585	26%
More Than 1 Race	109	5%
Native American or American Indian or Alaskan Native	37	1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	16	1%
White or Caucasian	1158	51%
Total*	**2261**	

**Excludes 5,535 students with Unknown Race/Ethnicity*

Table 2: Efficacy and Cost-Per-Outcome by Race/Ethnicity			
Race/Ethnicity	**# Students who Achieved Outcome**	**Efficacy**	**Cost-Per-Outcome (CPO)**
Asian	28	55%	$7,328
Black or African American	124	41%	$8,824
Hispanic or Latino	203	35%	$12,099
More Than 1 Race	47	43%	$9,355
Native American or American Indian or Alaskan Native	12	32%	$11,430
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	8	50%	$6,860
White or Caucasian	585	51%	$7,971
Total	**1007**		

MM Analysis & Recommendations from Beneficiary Race/Ethnicity Data:

- The range of efficacy rates for students with race/ethnicity data available is narrow; all falling between 35%-55%

- GA may want to explore additional strategies to support students with racial/ethnic identities that fell below the overall efficacy rate (46%) including students who are Black/African American, Hispanic or Latino, and Native American or American Indian or Alaskan Native
- GA should continue advocating for standardized collection of race/ethnicity data for all participants to obtain a more accurate picture of students served and increase understanding of programmatic efficacy across race/ethnicity,
- CPO analysis suggests students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds may require more resources and supports to achieve successful outcomes.

Efficacy and CPO Analysis by Beneficiary Age at Enrollment

Summary of Findings: Student age at enrollment in the Dropout Recovery Program ranged from 14-22 years old. Nearly 75% of all students were 16-18 years old at the time of enrollment while younger and older students made up a much smaller portion. Efficacy based on student age at enrollment ranged from 36% (21 years old) to 51% (14 & 17 years old). Students aged 15 and 16 at the time of enrollment had the highest CPOs: $10,461 & $11,619, respectively. The students aged 22 at enroll had the lowest CPO of $3,904.

Table 3: Age at Enroll of All Students		
Age at Enroll	**# Students**	**% Total**
14	207	3%
15	539	7%
16	1385	18%
17	2276	29%
18	1916	25%
19	842	11%
20	484	6%
21	133	2%
22	14	0%
Total	**7802**	

Table 4: Efficacy and Cost-Per-Outcome by Student Age at Enroll			
Age at Enroll	**# Students who Achieved Outcome**	**Efficacy**	**Cost-Per-Outcome (CPO)**
14	105	51%	$ 8,597
15	231	43%	$10,461
16	594	43%	$11,619
17	1152	51%	$8,118
18	924	48%	$6,990
19	347	41%	$7,698
20	208	43%	$6,778
21	48	36%	$6,607
22	7	50%	$3,904
Total	**3616**		

MM Analysis & Recommendations from Beneficiary Enrollment Age Data:

- Students who enrolled at ages 17-22 all had lower CPOs than the entire portfolio CPO, possibly reflecting that older students have a shorter distance to go in graduating than younger students, thus requiring less resources
- MM's CPO analysis demonstrates that students who are aged 17 and older at time of enrollment have lower CPO than students ages 14-16, with the oldest students ages 20, 21,

22 having the lowest CPO of all students served suggesting program cost-efficiencies for older students

- GA should continue to collect and analyze enrollment age data to understand and inform programmatic performance benchmarks

Efficacy and CPO Analysis by Beneficiary Gender

Summary of Findings: Among students in the Dropout Recovery Program, 47% (3,636) identify as female, 53% (4,106) identify as male, and 1% (54) did not specify their gender. Compared to students identifying as male or unspecified gender, students identifying as female had greater success on average at achieving outcomes and lower costs to do so. The average efficacy rate and Cost-Per-Outcome for students identifying as female was above overall programmatic efficacy (50%) and lower than overall CPO ($7,921) whereas students who identified as male or who did not specify their gender had lower efficacy rates and higher CPOs than the portfolio average.

Table 5: Gender of All Students		
Gender	**# Students**	**% Total**
Female	3636	47%
Male	4106	53%
Not Specified	54	1%
Total	**7796**	

Table 6: Efficacy and Cost-Per-Outcome by Student Gender			
Gender	**# Students who Achieved Outcome**	**Efficacy**	**Cost-Per-Outcome (CPO)**
Female	1829	50%	$7,921
Male	1765	43%	$8,947
Not Specified	22	41%	$8,073
Total	**3616**		

MM Analysis & Recommendations from Beneficiary Gender Data:

- Efficacy data by gender suggest the program is more impactful for students identifying as female vs. students identifying as male or those who did not specify their gender
- CPO data also suggest the program is more cost-effective for students identifying as female compared to the others
- GA should continue to collect and analyze beneficiary gender data to understand and inform programmatic performance benchmarks
- Efficacy and CPO data by gender can be used to determine if/when gender-responsive modifications may be necessary to improve student outcomes

Efficacy and CPO Analysis by Beneficiary Characteristics

Summary of Findings: Dropout Recovery Program students include some who are English Language Learners, students who receive free/reduced lunch, and students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)/504 plans. Nearly 50% of students served receive free or reduced lunch, 18% of students have IEPs/504 plans, and 1% of all students served are English Language Learners. Across these groups, English Language Learners had the lowest efficacy rate (28%). Students who receive free/reduced lunch, and students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)/504 plans were closer to overall efficacy with rates of 40% and 46% respectively. Cost-Per-Outcome (CPO) was higher than portfolio average for students who are English Language Learners ($11,458) & students who receive free/reduced lunch ($9,786), whereas students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)/504 had CPO to the overall CPO ($8,509).

Table 7: Characteristics of All Students		
Characteristics	**# Students**	**% Total**
English Language Learner	72	1%
Free/Reduced Lunch	3849	49%
IEP/504	1388	18%

Table 8: Efficacy and Cost-Per-Outcome by Student Characteristics			
Characteristics	**# Students who Achieved Outcome**	**Efficacy**	**Cost-Per-Outcome (CPO)**
English Language Learner	20	28%	$11,458
Free/Reduced Lunch	1533	40%	$9,786
IEP/504	641	46%	$8,509

MM Analysis & Recommendations from Beneficiary Characteristic Data:

- Compared to all students served, English Language Learners have substantially lower efficacy rates & higher costs to achieve successful outcomes. Similarly, students who receive free/reduced lunch also have slightly lower than average efficacy rates and higher costs to achieve successful outcomes
- Very few students identified as English Language Learners, so results for this group should be viewed with come caution.
- For students who have language barriers, may be living in poverty, and/or who require additional services and supports to succeed in the classroom, GA should continue to use efficacy data to understand and respond to what these students may need to achieve success
- GA should continue to collect and analyze data on beneficiary characteristics to understand and inform programmatic performance benchmarks

Efficacy and CPO Analysis by Total Number of Meet Ups

Summary of Findings: Meet ups are a key component of many programs' interventions, but participation is not always mandatory and varies widely. The number of meet ups ranges from 0 - 179 meet ups across all students. Despite the wide range in total number, most students (63%) had between 1-15 meet ups while enrolled in the program. 8% of students had 0 meet ups, 9% of students had between 16-20 meet ups, 7% had 21-25 meet ups and 14% had more than 26 meet ups while enrolled in the program. Among students with successful outcomes, students with greater than 26 meet ups had the highest efficacy rate (67%), and also the highest Cost-Per-Outcome ($12,735). Students with 0 meet ups had the lowest efficacy rate (21%).

Table 9: Number of Meet Ups for All Students

# Meet Ups	# Students	% Total
0	653	8%
1-5	2322	30%
6-10	1458	19%
11-15	1099	14%
16-20	678	9%
21-25	527	7%
26+	1059	14%
Total	**7796**	

Table 10: Efficacy and Cost-Per-Outcome by Total # Meet Ups

# Meet Ups	# Students who Achieved Outcome	Efficacy	Cost-Per-Outcome (CPO)
0	134	21%	$9,754
1-5	696	30%	$6,684
6-10	730	50%	$5,910
11-15	626	57%	$7,068
16-20	393	58%	$9,002
21-25	332	63%	$9,766
26+	705	67%	$12,735
Total	**3616**		

MM Analysis & Recommendations from Total Number of Meet Up Data:

- There is a substantial increase in programmatic efficacy among students with 1-5 meet ups (30%) compared to students with 6-10 meet ups (50%) suggesting students who have 5 or fewer meet ups are much less likely to have successful outcomes. This suggests that Graduation Alliance should endeavor wherever possible to get students into meetups with the sweet spot being that 6 – 15 level.

- The highest efficacy rate (67%) occurred among students with 26+ meet ups, demonstrating the importance of GA's high-touch approach, however it should be noted that successful outcomes aligned to increases in total meet ups are also associated with higher CPOs.
- Students with 0 meet ups had higher than average CPOs while the 63% of students with 1-15 meet ups all had lower than average CPOs. Understandably, students with 26+ meet ups had the highest CPO ($12,735)
- GA should complement these efficacy and CPO by total number of meet up data with insights on content, structure, and cadence of meet ups to help increase understanding of what, in addition to quantity, makes meet ups so impactful

Efficacy and CPO Analysis by ALE vs. 1418 Districts

Within the broader Dropout Recovery Program, Graduation Alliance runs two specific types that are worth noting (and analyzing): ALE and 1418. Washington State developed the Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) program rules to increase student access to more flexible learning environments. The program includes accountability policies set by local school districts to ensure progress away from a traditional classroom and was intended to serve a wide spectrum of students. The state later introduced HB1418 which created specific program rules for programs that re-engaged high school dropouts. The rules for student engagement in 1418 programs were tightly focused on outcomes in lieu of seat-time and wraparound support services but evolved to require mandatory face-to-face requirements and state approval during limited time windows. To meet these requirements, Graduation Alliance has aligned the Dropout Recovery Program in certain districts with these two models. Districts' decision making about which program to use as a vehicle for their dropout recovery efforts typically was influenced by the timing of the program launch and whether the eligibility criteria were broad enough to serve the students they wished to be served through the program.

Summary of Findings: Over 50% of Graduation Alliance students are affiliated with an ALE or 1418 district. Compared to the 3,330 students in non-ALE or non-1418 districts, these groups of students experienced slightly lower than average efficacy rates and higher costs to achieve successful outcomes. Non-1418/ALE districts had 52% efficacy and $6,662 CPO whereas 1418 districts had a 44% efficacy rate and $9,800 CPO, and ALE districts at 40% efficacy and $10,413 CPO.

Table 11: Number of Students by District Type

District Type	# Students	% Total
1418	2811	34%
ALE	1655	19%
N/A	3330	48%
Total	**7796**	

Table 12: Efficacy and Cost-Per-Outcome by District Type

District Type	# Students who Achieved Outcome	Efficacy	Cost-Per-Outcome (CPO)
1418	1228	44%	$9,800
ALE	670	40%	$10,413
N/A	1718	52%	$ 6,662
Total	**3616**		

MM Analysis & Recommendations from Beneficiary Characteristic Data:

- MM's efficacy analysis of 1418 vs. ALE vs. non-specified districts demonstrates that both 1418 and ALE have lower than average efficacy rates & higher than average CPOs which could signal that a running this type of program design may be affecting student outcomes.
- Interestingly, when analyzing costs and efficacy of districts not designated as ALE or 1418 districts (as noted by N/A above) these have higher than average efficacy (52%) and lower than average CPO ($6,662)
- GA should continue to aggregate efficacy and cost data by district type to better understand how differences in district type impact student success and the costs associated with achieving outcome
- GA should also look to see if specific ALE or 1418 districts are running variations of the program with different results as they could be a model to grow the impact from these programs

Program Strategies 'Gene' Analysis

As Graduation Alliance looks to expand its existing footprint and continue improving beneficiary impact, there is interest to understand how program design and execution impacts district efficacy rates. For instance, are there common program strategies/core components prioritized by high efficacy districts that could be used more broadly across the program? To help answer this question, Mission Measurement collected district level data on what program strategies are used and how important those strategies are to overall beneficiary success. Mission Measurement utilized our taxonomy of 'genes' from the Education and Social Capital Genomes to build the survey for data collection.

Once data was collected from Graduation Alliance local advocates, Mission Measurement analyzed the data by:

1. Identifying the top quartile of districts that could be considered high efficacy programs. Districts with fewer than 30 students over the time period in question were deemed too small and excluded from the analysis.
2. Compiled a list of the high efficacy genes that were most commonly ranked as 'important' or 'very important' by these high efficacy districts.
3. From this list of genes commonly prioritized in high efficacy programs, a comparison was run to see how frequently they were prioritized by lower efficacy programs (the bottom three quartiles of districts). Those genes that were prioritized at a significantly higher frequency by high efficacy programs than lower efficacy programs are deemed to be likely differentiators that Graduation Alliance should work to expand the use of.

Genes Most Commonly Prioritized by High Efficacy Districts

Genes	**Percent of high efficacy districts** (top quartile), that rank this gene as important or very important	**Percent of lower efficacy districts** (bottom three quartiles), that rank this gene as important or very important
Incorporate ongoing interactions between participants.	89%	62%
Incorporate the creation of a safe space.	100%	88%
Incorporate structures for accountability.	90%	83%
Focus on academic content.	100%	85%
Intervention is self-taught / self-paced.	88%	63%
Include pre-intervention facilitator training.	100%	65%
Include ongoing facilitator training.	100%	70%
Include focus on intervention in facilitator training.	100%	68%
Provide training materials to facilitators.	100%	74%
Include a focus on topic-specific content in facilitator training.	100%	76%
Include a focus on the facilitators' role.	100%	81%
Include a focus on context of the beneficiaries in facilitator training.	100%	66%

Include online access to facilitator supports.	100%	71%
Include learning community for facilitators.	100%	71%
Utilize phone / virtual communication.	89%	86%
Intervention is accessible remotely.	89%	86%
Incorporate motivational beliefs activities.	86%	74%
Engage caregivers/families in the intervention	100%	75%
Include communications about youth with caregiver / family	100%	77%
Incorporate methods for learning from caregiver / family	89%	64%

The genes highlighted in green have the largest difference in the percent of high efficacy districts that prioritize them compared to lower efficacy districts. This suggests that these genes can – at least partially – help Graduation Alliance understand some of the difference in performance. The key themes that emerge include:

- Providing facilitators sufficient pre-program training and access to ongoing and self-paced support
- Incorporating families/caregivers into the intervention
- Facilitating ongoing interactions among program participants

In addition to the program genes discussed above, Mission Measurement also captured data on the 'context genes' that provides details for the context or conditions in which the program was implemented. These context genes were collected through the same survey with local advocates. For the context genes, respondents were simply asked to select yes if the particular context is present in their programs, or no if it is not.

Context Genes most Commonly Prioritized by High Efficacy Districts

Context Genes	**Percent of high efficacy districts** (top quartile), that noted this context is present	**Percent of lower efficacy districts** (bottom three quartiles), that noted this context is present
Facilitator education – Bachelor's degree.	80%	81%
Facilitator education – Master's degree.	90%	54%
Year-round scheduling.	100%	94%
School/center type – Public.	100%	100%
Intervention Setting - Non-school indoor	80%	94%
GA is primarily for full-time dropout recovery	93%	85%
GA supports students with expulsions and long-term suspensions	87%	91%
GA supports students who would otherwise leave the district entirely to attend virtual school	87%	87%
GA supports students who are on leave to take care of home or medical needs	87%	87%
GA supports students in dropout prevention (anxiety, depression, bullying)	80%	85%
District provides complete notes and transcripts on students	80%	77%

District provides credit / graduation verification with counselors	87%	81%
District requires limited documentation for participants to enroll. 1	100%	87%

The context gene highlighted in green has the biggest difference in the percent of high efficacy districts that noted its presence compared to lower efficacy districts. In this case, the presence of a facilitator that has at least a master's degree was much more common among higher efficacy programs than lower efficacy programs. However, given that lack of different percentages between the two groups of districts, we can ascertain that the relative context among all programs is similar and not a huge driver of differences in efficacy rate.

For the genes and context genes notes above, we recommend considering the results directional and performing additional follow-ups to verify the findings (e.g., the importance of facilitator training and incorporation of families/ caregivers). Graduation Alliance should consider incorporating data collection on genes into regular reporting that districts submit. This is a great way to improve the rigor of the data, spot innovation early, and help understand why some districts are more successful than others so that their approach can be duplicated.