

Educational Opportunity Centers Grantee-Level Performance Results: 2008–09

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Education is committed to ongoing improvement in managing its programs so as to improve the educational outcomes of students. In its efforts to strengthen the work of its programs, the Department provides grantees, key stakeholders, and the public with data on programs' performance and with contextual information to encourage reflection, action, and collaboration. The Department uses postsecondary enrollment rates and rates of project participants who are both low-income and potential first-generation college students, discussed in detail below, as its measures of the Educational Opportunity Centers program's performance.

Performance measures for Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) projects

The two performance measures for EOC projects are:

- Enrollment rate: the percentage of “college-ready” project participants who enroll in postsecondary educational institutions.
- The rate of service to participants who are both low-income and potential first-generation college students.

The grantees' Annual Performance Reports (APRs) are the source of data for calculating these measures. The 2008–09 EOC APR was similar to the 2007–08 APR in format. While the 2005–06 and earlier years' format specifically used the term “college-ready,” subsequent APRs did not; rather, they followed the language of the standardized objectives for projects in the fiscal year 2006 grant competition. The APR thus indicated that the standardized enrollment objective would have as its denominator members of the following groups of participants, who would indeed often be ready for college: adults without HS diploma or equivalency credentials (19 years or older) enrolled in a continuing education program at an academic level equivalent to a high school senior (APR Section III, item A2), high school graduates or high school equivalency graduates not already enrolled in a postsecondary school (III.A3), postsecondary dropouts (III.A4), potential postsecondary transfers (III.A6), high school seniors (III.B2), and participants not older than 18 years enrolled in an alternative education program at an academic level equivalent to a high school senior (III.B4). Grantees report the number of participants in each subcategory; the sum of these is the number of college-ready participants. The specifics of each calculation can be found in the Appendix.

The measure of the rate of service to participants who are both low-income and potential first-generation college students arose from the requirement in the Higher Education Act that not less than two-thirds of persons participating in an EOC project be in that group. The data for the measure show to what extent the EOC program and its individual grantees have gone beyond the two-thirds requirement to serve the specified students.

Selected findings

Table 1 displays the number and percentage of college-ready participants who enrolled in postsecondary educational institutions, and the number and percentage of all participants who were both low-income and potential first-generation college students. The table also presents the total number of participants served and the number of those who were college-ready. The data are presented at the program level and at the individual project level. The calculation methodology for Table 1 can be found in the Appendix.

For 2008–09, the program-level postsecondary enrollment rate for EOC was 59.8 percent of all college-ready participants. This was four percentage points higher than the 2007–08 program-level postsecondary enrollment rate (55.9 percent), and it exceeded the Department’s 2008–09 program-level goal of 59.5 percent.

The 2008–09 program-level rate for service to participants who were both low-income and potential first-generation college students was 76.6 percent of all participants. This percentage was higher than the 2007–08 program-level rate of 74.3 percent and exceeded the Department’s 2008–09 program-level goal of 75 percent.

Table 2 displays the number and percentage of college-ready participants who enrolled in two-year, four-year, other, and unknown types of postsecondary educational institutions, at the program and project level, as well as aggregated by the type of grantee. The overall enrollment rate was highest for participants served by grantees that are two-year institutions (63.6 percent), followed by grantees that are not institutions of higher education (59.8 percent), with the lowest rate for grantees that are four-year institutions (56.8 percent).

In general, EOC participants were more likely to enroll in a two-year postsecondary educational institution (65.6 percent of enrollees) than a four-year institution (20.4 percent) or another type of institution (13.2 percent; 0.7 percent unknown type of institution). However, the type of grantee institution through which participants were served in the EOC program influenced the type of postsecondary educational institution enrolled in. The calculation methodology for Table 2 can be found in the Appendix.

The pattern of enrollment in various types of postsecondary educational institutions was as follows:

- Overall, a greater proportion of EOC participants enrolled in a two-year (65.6 percent) rather than a four-year (20.4 percent) or other type of postsecondary educational institution (13.2 percent, with 0.7 percent enrolled in an unknown type of institution).
- Participants served by four-year grantee institutions were somewhat more likely than other participants to enroll in four-year (28.0 percent) and other types of institutions (20.2 percent) and less likely than other participants to enroll in two-year institutions (51.3 percent, with 0.5 percent enrolled in an unknown type of institution).
- Participants served by two-year grantee institutions were less likely than other participants to enroll in four-year (8.1 percent) or other types of institutions (6.4 percent),

and more likely than other participants to enroll in two-year institutions (84.5 percent, with 1.0 percent enrolled in an unknown type of institution).

- Participants served by non-profit or other organizations were slightly more likely than other participants to enroll in four-year institutions (25.0 percent) and slightly less likely than other participants to enroll in two-year (62.2 percent) or other institutions (12.2 percent, with 0.6 percent enrolled in an unknown type of institution).

Table 2 also shows at the project level the sector of the individual grantees and the enrollment pattern of their postsecondary enrollees at four-year, two-year, other, and unknown institutions.

Limitations of data and findings

First, it is important to note that the enrollment rate is an outcome measure of project performance. The limitations of the dataset used for this analysis (the APRs) do not permit us to determine project impacts, such as the extent to which the postsecondary enrollment rate is a result of participation in EOC.

In addition, one should consider that the performance measure refers exclusively to outcomes of college-ready program participants, who accounted for 66.5 percent of all program participants in Table 1. While the enrollment measure is unquestionably the most important indicator for the Educational Opportunity Centers program, the program is also presumably helping many of the remaining one-third of its participants (who are not yet college-ready) make steady progress towards their own eventual postsecondary education.

Because the dataset does not permit analysis of the roles of all factors that may affect postsecondary enrollment rates in individual projects, **the data should be interpreted with caution; comparing rates between projects could lead to unwarranted conclusions.** For example, a project may have lower than average rates because the project may be serving more students with a high risk of academic failure, who have low educational aspirations, and/or who have low levels of readiness for enrollment in postsecondary education. The full documentation of each grantee's circumstances would require collecting far more data about the 124 grantees and over 200,000 participants served; such a data collection would be burdensome to grantees and would require a disproportionate commitment of the TRIO program's resources.

Efficiency measure for Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) projects

For EOC, the efficiency measure is the annual cost per participant who had a "successful outcome." For the purposes of this measure, on a yearly basis a participant is considered to have experienced a successful outcome if he or she enrolled in postsecondary education during the budget period or during the next fall term, or enrolled in a continuing education program during the budget period. Participants who experienced successful outcomes thus constituted a subset of all participants.

Postsecondary enrollment was calculated as described above in the enrollment rate calculations. In the EOC program, a continuing education program is any program that allows students to prepare themselves for postsecondary education via a diploma or equivalent—e.g., reenrollment

in high school or enrollment in a GED program. If a student goes from high school dropout status (or equivalent) directly to postsecondary education without an intervening program, for purposes of the EOC efficiency measure, the postsecondary education program counts as continuing education.

Selected findings

Table 3 shows the efficiency measure calculations at the individual project level and the program level, as well as aggregated by the type of grantee. The program-level efficiency measure was the \$482.99 annual cost per successful outcome. Among grantees, a lower annual cost per success tends to be an indication of higher efficiency. Four-year grantee institutions spent more money per successful outcome (\$512.82) and two-year grantee institutions and grantees that are not higher education institutions spent less money per successful outcome (\$458.94 and \$469.24, respectively) compared to all grantees.

At the program level, 47.0 percent of 2008–09 EOC participants experienced a successful outcome, an increase over the 2007–08 43.2 percent success rate. Grantees that are not higher education institutions had a lower percentage of participants who were successful (43.2 percent) than the program-level average, while two- and four-year institutions had slightly higher percentages of participants who were successful (49.2 and 48.2 percent, respectively) than the program-level average. However, given that these percentages do not fully explain the variation in cost per success among the three types of grantees, the differences in the efficiency measure between types of grantee may also be partially attributable to the mean number of participants served by each type of grantee; more specifically, the extent to which non-profit and other grantees achieved a lower than average cost per success may have been influenced by the mean number of participants served by these projects, which was significantly larger than the mean number served by four-year and two-year grantees. The calculation methodology for Table 3 can be found in the Appendix.

Limitations of data and findings

The efficiency measure varies among individual projects. These figures should be viewed with caution, and in some cases may be misleading. Individual projects may be serving many more or far fewer participants than they were funded to serve, which would skew the resulting efficiency measures. Given the possibility of such misinterpretation, it is important to consider the efficiency measure in the context of the other columns in the table, particularly the percentage of participants who were successful (which ranges from 10.0 percent to 89.4 percent). There may be valid reasons for some projects to have relatively low percentages of participants who were successful, however, so even these measures should not be used to compare individual projects in the absence of knowledge about project goals and populations served. For example, a project might be serving a high percentage of students with low levels of preparedness for enrollment in postsecondary education, resulting in a lower percentage of successful outcomes. In sum, all the data in Table 3 should be considered, not just one column, and data should be interpreted with caution; comparing rates among projects could lead to flawed conclusions.

APPENDIX

Calculation methodology for enrollment and rate of service to participants who are both low-income and potential first-generation college students (Tables 1 and 2) and efficiency measure (Table 3)

College-ready calculation

The total number of college-ready participants for each project was calculated by summing the total number of project participants reported for each of the following educational statuses (at time of first service in the budget period):

- Adults without HS diploma or equivalency credentials (19 years or older) enrolled in a continuing education program at an academic level equivalent to a high school senior (APR Section III, item A2);
- High school graduates or high school equivalency graduates not already enrolled in a postsecondary school (III.A3);
- Postsecondary dropouts (III.A4);
- Potential postsecondary transfers (III.A6);
- High school seniors (III.B2); and
- Participants not older than 18 years enrolled in an alternative education program at an academic level equivalent to a high school senior (III.B4).

Enrollment rate calculation

Each project's postsecondary enrollment rate (Table 1) was calculated by dividing the number of college-ready program participants who enrolled in postsecondary educational institutions during the 2008–09 budget period or in the fall 2009 term by the number of college-ready participants served by that grantee, and multiplying by 100. Each project reported the number of college-ready program participants who enrolled in postsecondary educational institutions during the 2008–09 budget period or in the fall 2009 term in APR Section IV, item D1.

Calculation for rate of service to participants who are both low-income and potential first-generation college students

Each project's rate for this measure, as shown in Table 1, was calculated by dividing the number of program participants who were *both* low-income *and* potential first-generation college students (APR Section II, item B1) by the total number of participants served by that project (II.A3), and multiplying by 100.

Enrollment by sector calculation

Each project's enrollment rate by sector (Table 2) was calculated by dividing the number of college-ready program participants who enrolled in each level of postsecondary institution by the number of college-ready program participants who enrolled in any postsecondary institution, and multiplying by 100. Each project reported the number of program participants who enrolled in each level of postsecondary educational institutions in APR section IV: items E1 and E2 reflect enrollment in a two-year institution, E3 and E4 reflect enrollment in a four-year institution, E5 and E6 reflect enrollment in any "other" institution, and E7 reflects enrollment in an educational institution of unknown type. The number of college-ready participants who enrolled in any postsecondary institution was reported by projects in APR Section IV, item D1.

Cost per success calculation

Each project's cost per success was calculated by dividing the number of successful program participants by the annual program funding for 2008–09. The number of successful outcomes was calculated as the sum of participants who enrolled in postsecondary education (APR Section IV, item D1) and participants who enrolled in continuing education (IV.A1).

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