

Talent Search Grantee-level Performance Results: 2006–07

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 application for financial aid, discussed in detail below, as its measures of the Talent Search program's performance.

Performance measures for Talent Search (TS) projects

The Department defines the two performance measures for TS projects in this manner:

- Enrollment rate: the percentage of college-ready project participants who enroll in a program of postsecondary education during each budget period or during the next fall term.
- Financial aid application rate: the percentage of college-ready participants who apply for financial aid during the budget period.

For Talent Search projects, “college-ready” project participants are defined as high school seniors (annual performance report [APR] Section III, item A3), their equivalents in alternative education programs (III.A4 and III.B1), high school graduates or their equivalents not already enrolled in a postsecondary school (III.B3), postsecondary dropouts (III.B4), and potential postsecondary transfers (III.B5). Grantees report the number of participants in each subcategory; the sum of these is the number of college-ready participants. Methodology for each calculation can be found in the Appendix.

Selected Findings

Table 1 displays the number and percentage of participants who enrolled in postsecondary educational institutions and applied for financial aid, along with the total number of participants served and the number of college-ready participants served. The data are presented at the program level, at the individual project level, and aggregated by the projects' new or continuing status. The calculation methodology for Table 1 can be found in Appendix A. Fourteen grantees were excluded from Table 1; details on these grantees and the reasons for their exclusion can be found in Appendix B.

For 2006–07, the program-level postsecondary enrollment rate for TS was 77.1 percent of all college-ready participants. This is slightly lower than the 2005-06 enrollment rate of 77.8%, and below the Department's program-level goal of 79% for 2006-07.

The 2006-07 program-level financial aid application rate was 84.1 percent of all college-ready participants. This represents a decrease from the 2005-06 financial aid application rate of 85.0%, and remains below the Department's program-level goal of 86.5% for 2006-07.

The slight drop in rates for 2006–07 might be due in part to the revised definition of "college-ready." In 2005–06, college-ready participants were 12th-grade high school students and high school (and high school equivalency) graduates. For 2006–07, college-ready participants were high school seniors (APR Section III, item A3), their equivalents in alternative education programs (III.A4 and III.B1), high school graduates or their equivalents not already enrolled in a postsecondary school (III.B3), postsecondary dropouts (III.B4), and potential postsecondary transfers (III.B5). The expanded definition of college-ready participants in 2006-07 may have resulted in a larger denominator for each rate calculation, and the participants regarded as college-ready in 2006-07 that would not have met the 2005-06 criteria may have been less likely to enroll in postsecondary education.

Grantees that were new to the TS program reported substantially lower proportions of college-ready participants, compared to continuing grantees. The 56 new grantees that reported serving at least one college-ready participant reported that 12.6% of the participants served were college-ready; the 440 continuing grantees reported a college-ready contingent of 20.7% of participants served.

If we examine only continuing grantees, the enrollment rate rises to 77.5% (from 77.1% including all grantees), and the financial aid application rate rises to 84.2% (from 84.1% including all grantees). While continuing grantees are not meeting established program targets, it appears that the performance of new grantees lags further behind (70.3% enrollment rate; 82.2% financial aid application rate).

There is little evidence that the proportion of college-ready participants served was correlated with either outcome measure, once the grantees' new or continuing status was considered. The one group with substantially different outcome rates is grantees with over 40% college-ready participants (the highest 6.7% of all grantees); these grantees had a 76.3% enrollment rate (lower than the overall program rate) and an 87.3% financial aid application rate (higher than the overall program rate). We can think of no reasonable explanation why these two rates should diverge for grantees serving the largest proportions of college-ready participants. Other groupings of grantees based on the proportion of college-ready participants served, including those with relatively few college-ready participants, exhibited outcome rates very similar to the overall outcome rates.

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 enrollment rate was highest for grantees that were not institutions of higher education (80.4 percent); college-ready participants at grantees that were four-year IHEs had a rate

of 76.6 percent, while college-ready students at two-year institutions enrolled at the rate of 74.8 percent.

Participants tended to enroll in postsecondary educational institutions of the same type as the grantee institution through which they participated in the TS program. The calculation methodology for Table 2 can be found in Appendix A, and the exclusion criteria can be found in Appendix B.

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

- Overall, a somewhat greater proportion of TS participants enrolled in a four-year rather than a two-year postsecondary educational institution (52.4% vs. 42.1% respectively).
- A considerably greater proportion of participants served by four-year grantee institutions enrolled in four-year rather than two-year institutions (61.5% vs. 33.2% respectively).
- Participants served by two-year grantee institutions exhibited the opposite pattern (40.3% vs. 56.0% respectively).
- Participants served by secondary schools or non-profit or other organizations enrolled in four-year and two-year postsecondary educational institutions in a pattern very similar to the overall participant population (51.7% vs. 40.9% respectively).

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.

Table 3 lists the 14 2006-07 TS grantees that were excluded from Tables 1 and 2 along with the reasons for exclusion. The exclusion methodology is further explained in Appendix B.

Limitations of Data and Findings

First, it is important to note that the enrollment rate and the financial aid application rate are outcome measures of project performance. The limitations of the data set used for this analysis (the APRs) do not permit us to determine project impacts, such as the extent to which the postsecondary enrollment rate or the financial aid application rate is a result of participation in TS.

Among the 496 projects in Table 1, 51 served fewer than 50 college-ready participants. For these projects, small changes in numbers can cause significant changes in percentages. For example, a grantee that serves five college-ready participants will have an enrollment rate of 100 percent if all enroll in postsecondary education, but a rate of only 80 percent if just one student does not matriculate. In other words, slight changes in

the numbers of participants enrolling in postsecondary education or applying for financial aid would result in large changes in the corresponding rates for those projects.

In addition, one should consider that both performance measures refer exclusively to outcomes of college-ready program participants, who accounted for only 20.1 percent of all program participants in Table 1. While the enrollment and financial aid measures are unquestionably the most important indicators for the Talent Search program, it should be remembered that the program is also presumably helping many of the remaining four-fifths of its participants (who are not yet college-ready) make steady progress towards their own eventual postsecondary education.

Because the data set does not permit analysis of the roles of all factors that may affect postsecondary enrollment rates and financial aid application 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 are in low performing high schools. The full documentation of each grantee's circumstances would require collecting far more data about the approximately 500 grantees and 370,000 participants served; such a data collection would be burdensome to grantees and would require a disproportionate commitment of the TRIO program's resources.

APPENDIX

Appendix A. Calculation methodology for enrollment and financial aid application rates (Tables 1 and 2)

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):

- High school senior (APR Section III, item A3),
- Alternative education equivalent to high school senior (III.A4),
- 19 or older, reentered school as senior or alternative education equivalent (III.B1),
- 19 or older, high school or high school equivalency graduate not already enrolled in a postsecondary school (III.B3),
- 19 or older, postsecondary dropout (III.B4), and
- 19 or older, potential postsecondary transfer (III.B5).

Enrollment Rate Calculation

Each project's postsecondary enrollment rate was calculated by dividing the number of program participants who enrolled in postsecondary educational institutions during the 2006–07 budget period or in the fall 2007 term by the number of college-ready participants served by that grantee, and multiplying by 100. Each project reported the number of program participants who enrolled in postsecondary educational institutions during the 2006–07 budget period or in the fall 2007 term in APR Section IV, item E1.

Financial Aid Application Rate Calculation

Each project's financial aid application rate was calculated by dividing the number of program participants who applied for postsecondary financial aid during the 2006–07 budget period by the number of college-ready participants served by that grantee, and multiplying by 100. Each project reported the number of program participants who applied for postsecondary financial aid during the 2006–07 budget period in APR Section IV, item C.

Appendix B. Grantees excluded from Tables 1 and 2

It is important to note that not all 2006-07 TS grantees are included in Tables 1 and 2. Of the 510 grantees funded for 2006-07, three did not submit an APR, so no data was available to reflect their 2006-07 performance:

- Ohio Dominican College, OH (P044A020359)
- Abilene Christian University, TX (P044A020453)
- Compton Community College, CA (P044A021028)

Furthermore, 11 grantees that did submit an APR reported zero college-ready participants in 2006-07:

- Applied Information Management Institute, NE (P044A060691)
- Missouri Southern State University, MO (P044A060018)
- CUNY/Lehman College, NY (P044A060498)
- Washington State University/Pullman, WA (P044A060592)
- California State University/ Northridge, CA (P044A060605)
- California State University/ Northridge, CA (P044A060607)
- Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, PA (P044A060653)
- New Mexico State University/Las Cruces, NM (P044A060889)
- Florida Community College/Jacksonville, FL (P044A060136)
- Mineral Area College, MO (P044A060599)
- Tallahassee Community College, FL (P044A060617)

Because both outcome measures pertain only to college-ready participants, these 11 grantees are excluded from Tables 1 and 2.

Data from a total of 496 grantees are present in Tables 1 and 2.

This list of excluded grantees is also included as a stand-alone reference in Table 3.