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# Talent Search Program

Project and Program Measures for Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA)

Reporting Period: 2020-21

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## Introduction

The Talent Search (TS) program aims to improve the college enrollment rate for middle school and high school students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The U.S. Department of Education’s annual *Government Performance and Results Act* (GPRA) report includes two measures of TS program outcomes and one measure of TS program efficiency. The 2020–21 reporting year was the fifth year of the 2016–21 funding cycle, and calculation rules for participant outcomes and program efficiency in 2020–21 are the same as those used in previous reporting years.

## Program Outcome Measures for TS Projects

The two TS program outcome measures are postsecondary enrollment (PSE) rates and financial aid application rates. These measures were calculated using the TS *Annual Performance Report* (APR). The definitions of performance measures and calculation methodology have remained the same between reporting years.

* The PSE rate was calculated as the percentage of college-ready senior participants[[1]](#footnote-1) who enrolled in postsecondary education by the fall term immediately following high school graduation or by the next academic term if the institution deferred the participant’s enrollment. GPRA tables also present the types of institutions in which these college-ready participants enrolled.
* The financial aid application rate was calculated as the percentage of high school seniors who completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

### Selected Findings for Participant Outcomes

GPRA Table 1 (see Excel workbook) displays the percentage of participants who were college-ready; the percentage of college-ready participants who enrolled in postsecondary institutions; the percentage of participants who were senior participants; and the percentage of senior participants who applied for financial aid. This table also displays the total number of participants served. The calculation methodology for GPRA Table 1 is discussed in the Appendix.

#### Postsecondary Education Enrollment

* In 2020–21, the TS program-level PSE rate was 65.2 percent. This was 4.8 percentage points lower than the 2019–20 program-level postsecondary education enrollment rate of 70.0 percent, and it did not meet the U.S. Department of Education’s 2020–21 program-level goal of 81.0 percent.
* There were 147 grantees that experienced a decline in the PSE rate of 10 percentage points or more between reporting years, compared with 140 in the previous year. Ninety-nine of the 147 grantees experienced a decline between 9.5 percentage points and 19 percentage points. Forty-eight of the grantees experienced a decline of 20 percentage points or more.

#### Applications for Financial Aid

* In 2020–21, the TS financial aid application rate was 72.9 percent. This rate was 7.8 percentage points lower than the 2019–20 financial aid application rate of 80.7 percent. This decrease in the financial aid application rate occurred because the decrease in the number of seniors who completed the FAFSA (14.8 percent) exceeded the decrease in the number of senior participants (5.8 percent).
* We observed that 189 grantees experienced a decline of 10 or more percentage points in the financial aid application rate between reporting years. One hundred of the 189 grantees experienced a decline between 9.5 percentage points and 19 percentage points. Eighty-nine of the grantees experienced a decline of 20 percentage points or more.

GPRA Table 2 (see Excel workbook) displays the percentage of college-ready participants who enrolled in four-year, two-year, other (i.e., vocational, proprietary), or unknown types of postsecondary institutions at the program level and at the grantee level. Information is also presented by grantee sector (i.e., four-year grantee institutions, two-year grantee institutions, and other organizations). The calculation methodology for GPRA Table 2 is discussed in the Appendix.

In general, TS participants who enrolled in postsecondary education in 2020–21 were more likely to enroll in a four-year institution (58.4 percent) than in a two-year institution (39.0 percent), other type of institution (1.8 percent), or unknown type of institution (0.8 percent). The percentages of participants enrolling in each of the four types of institutions were similar to the percentages observed in 2019–20.

As in 2019–20, PSE rates did not vary widely by grantee type. Participants who received services from TS grants administered by two-year institutions had a PSE rate of 64.1 percent in 2020–21. Enrollment rates were only slightly higher for participants who received services from four-year institutions (65.6 percent) and participants who received services from nonprofit and other types of organizations (66.1 percent). In 2020–21, participants were most likely to enroll in a postsecondary institution of the same type as the grantee through which they participated in the TS program:

* A larger percentage of participants served by four-year grantee institutions enrolled in four-year postsecondary institutions (63.1 percent) than those served by two-year institutions (49.2 percent).
* A larger percentage of participants served by two-year grantee institutions enrolled in two-year postsecondary institutions (49.1 percent) than those served by four-year institutions (34.2 percent).
* More participants served by nonprofit and other types of organizations enrolled in four-year institutions (59.8 percent) rather than in two-year institutions (36.8 percent).

### Limitations of Participant Outcome Findings

First, it is important to note that the PSE rates (shown in GPRA Table 1 and in GPRA Table 2) and the financial aid application rates (shown in GPRA Table 1) are outcome measures of project performance. These outcome measures only reflect how the grantees performed and should not be interpreted as evidence of TS impact. Furthermore, in each year after COVID-19 began in 2020, there has been an increase in the number of grantees that are serving fewer participants than they were funded to serve. More specifically, 318 grantees served fewer participants in 2020–21when compared to 193 in 2019–20 and to 36 in 2018-19 (pre-COVID-19). As such, it may be inferred that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to negatively impact grantees’ ability to reach participants and provide them with services.

Second, of the 473 projects listed in GPRA Table 1, 33 grantees served between one and 50 college-ready participants (the denominator for the PSE rate measure). Similarly, 30 grantees served between one and 50 high school seniors (the denominator for the financial aid application rate measure). For projects serving a small number of seniors and college-ready participants, small changes in the number of postsecondary enrollees or financial aid applicants can result in large changes in percentages.

Third, approximately 21 percent of TS participants were college-ready or high school seniors (see GPRA Table 1). Although the PSE and financial aid application measures are unquestionably the most important indicators of success for the TS program, the program is also presumably providing services to many of the remaining four-fifths of program participants, who are not yet college-ready, to assist their progress toward postsecondary education.

Finally, these data should be interpreted with caution. Comparing rates between projects could lead to unwarranted conclusions, primarily because the TS data do not permit an analysis of other factors that may affect PSE rates and financial aid application rates within an individual grantee. For example, a grantee may have lower-than-average rates because it serves more disadvantaged students—those who are at high risk of academic failure, have low educational aspirations, or are in low-performing high schools.

## Efficiency Measure for TS Projects

The efficiency measure for the TS program is the gap (difference) between two cost figures: the annual cost per participant with a successful outcome and the annual cost per participant. A participant was considered to have experienced a successful outcome if ethe participant was (1) a high school senior during the reporting year who either enrolled in postsecondary education in the subsequent fall term or was notified of deferred enrollment or (2) a middle school student or a non-senior high school student who persisted in school for the next academic year at the next grade level or graduated from high school. All postsecondary enrollments were counted as successful student outcomes regardless of college-ready status. The annual cost per participant with a successful outcome was calculated by dividing the amount of TS funding available to the grantee during the reporting year by the number of participants who experienced a successful outcome.

The annual cost per participant was derived by dividing the amount of TS funding available to the grantee during the reporting year by the total number of participants served. The calculation methodology for GPRA Table 3, which contains the efficiency measures for TS grantees, can be found in the Appendix.

### Selected Efficiency Findings

GPRA Table 3 (see Excel workbook) presents the efficiency measure at the program level, at the sector level, and at the grantee level.

* At the program level, the average cost per successful outcome was $716, which is higher than the U.S. Department of Education’s 2020–21 program-level goal of $460.
* The efficiency gap was $74, larger than the efficiency gap estimated for 2019–20, which was $54.
* The efficiency gap for four-year grantee institutions increased from $51 in the previous 2019–20 reporting year to $69 in the 2020–21 reporting year.
* The efficiency gap for two-year grantees increased from $47 in the previous reporting year to $66 in the 2020–21 reporting year.
* The efficiency gap for other types of grantees increased from $76 in the previous reporting year to $106 in the 2020–21 reporting year.
* Across individual projects, the efficiency gap ranged from $0 to $5,007. Five grantees had a $0 gap, indicating that all participants within these grantees experienced one of the successful outcomes (either postsecondary enrollment or secondary school persistence).

### Limitations of Efficiency Data and Findings

The efficiency measure is the difference between the cost of serving all participants and the cost of serving participants who attain a successful outcome. A larger gap does not necessarily indicate lower efficiency in yielding desirable outcomes. Other factors—such as the number of participants served, the academic abilities of the targeted participants, and whether grantees served more participants or fewer participants than the number they were funded to serve—play a role in the observed difference between the two costs. These measures therefore should not be used to compare individual grantees in the absence of knowledge about project goals and target populations, as this could lead to flawed conclusions.

## Appendix

In this Appendix, we provide the calculation rules for PSE rates and financial aid application rates (GPRA Table 1); the percentage of postsecondary enrollees who enrolled in specific types of postsecondary institutions (GPRA Table 2); and the efficiency measure (GPRA Table 3).

1. PSE Rate

The PSE rate is defined as the percentage of college-ready senior participants who had enrolled in a program of postsecondary education by the fall term immediately following high school graduation or by the next academic term if the institution deferred the participant’s enrollment.

* 1. College-Ready Participants

The following APR data fields are used to calculate the number of college-ready participants:

* + - IV.B1 (RcvdRSDipNo) Received regular secondary school diploma within the standard number of years but did not complete a rigorous program of study;
    - IV.B2 (RcvdRSdipRigPgmNo) Received regular secondary school diploma and completed a rigorous program of study within the standard number of years;
    - IV.B3 (Part4BRcvdRSDipNotStdNo) Received a regular secondary school diploma but not within the standard number of years; and
    - IV.B4 (RcvdAltAwdNo) Received an alternative award (e.g., certificate of attendance or a high school equivalency certificate).
  1. Count of College-Ready Participants Enrolled in Postsecondary Institutions

Postsecondary enrollees were identified using the following APR fields:

* + - IV.C1 (PSE\_RcvdRDipNO) Received regular secondary school diploma within standard number of years but did not complete a rigorous program of study and enrolled in a postsecondary institution or notified of deferred enrollment;
    - IV.C2 (PSE\_RcvdRDipRigPgmNo) Received regular secondary school diploma and completed a rigorous program of study within standard number of years and enrolled in a postsecondary institution or notified of deferred enrollment;
    - IV.C3 (PSE\_Part4CRcvdRSDipNotStdNo) Received a regular secondary school diploma but not within the standard number of years and enrolled in a postsecondary institution or notified of deferred enrollment; and
    - IV.C4 (PSE\_RcvdHSEquCredNO) Received an alternative award (e.g., certificate of attendance or a high school equivalency certificate) and enrolled in a postsecondary institution or notified of deferred enrollment.
  1. PSE Rate Calculation

The number of college-ready participants and the number of postsecondary enrollees were summed across the diploma and credential categories. The PSE rate was then calculated by dividing the aggregated measure for college-ready postsecondary enrollees by the aggregated measure for college-ready participants:

PSE rate = (IV.C1 + IV.C2 + IV.C3 + IV.C4) / (IV.B1 + IV.B2 + IV.B3 + IV.B4)

1. Financial Aid Application Rate

The financial aid application rate is defined as the percentage of high school seniors who completed the FAFSA during the reporting year.

* 1. High School Seniors

The denominator for the financial aid application rate includes all participants in the final (senior) year of high school:

* III.A5 (HighSchSNo) Seniors in high school or in alternative education organized by grade (12th grade only); and
* III.A8 (HighSch5yrDEnrlNo) Students in their fifth year of high school in a five-year dual enrollment program (III.A8).
  1. Count of Senior Participants Who Applied for Financial Aid

The numerator for the financial aid application rate includes all seniors who completed the FAFSA:

* II.K1 (SenrCompFASFAPNO) Seniors who completed the FAFSA but did not enroll in postsecondary education; and
* II.K2 (SenrCompFASFAenrlCollgPNO) Seniors who completed the FAFSA and enrolled in postsecondary education.
  1. Financial Aid Application Rate Calculation

The financial aid application rate was calculated by dividing the number of seniors who completed the FAFSA by the number of senior participants for each project:

Financial aid application rate = (II.K1 + II.K2) / (III.A5+ III.A8)

1. Types of Postsecondary Institutions in Which Participants Enrolled

Section IV.D of the TS APR form asks grantees to report the number of postsecondary enrollees who enrolled in different types of postsecondary institutions. Grantees provide counts of participants within secondary school diploma and credential categories for each postsecondary institution type.

* + - The number of participants enrolling in two-year institutions was calculated by summing the APR data fields IV.D1.b (pub2\_RcvdRDipNO), IV.D1.c (pub2\_RcvdRDipRigPgmNo); IV.D1.e (pub2\_Part4CRcvdRSDipNotStdNo); and IV.D1.f (pub2\_RcvdHSEquCredNO)—which refer to public two-year institutions—and the fields IV.D2.b (pvt2\_RcvdRDipNO); IV.D2.c (pvt2\_RcvdRDipRigPgmNo); IV.D2.e (pvt2\_Part4CRcvdRSDipNotStdNo); and IV.D2.f (pvt2\_RcvdHSEquCredNO),which refer to private two-year institutions among participants who received a secondary school diploma or an alternative secondary school credential during the reporting year.
    - The number of participants enrolling in four-year institutions was calculated by summing the APR data fields IV.D3.b (pub4\_RcvdRDipNO); IV.D3.c (pub4\_RcvdRDipRigPgmNo); IV.D3.e (pub4\_Part4CRcvdRSDipNotStdNo); and IV.D3.f (pub4\_RcvdHSEquCredNO)—which refer to public four-year institutions—and the fields IV.D4.b (pvt4\_RcvdRDipNO), IV.D4.c (pvt4\_RcvdRDipRigPgmNo); IV.D4.e (pvt4\_Part4CRcvdRSDipNotStdNo); and IV.D4.f (pvt4\_RcvdHSEquCredNO),which refer to private four-year institutions among participants who received a secondary school diploma or an alternative secondary school credential during the reporting year.
    - The number of participants attending other types of institutions was calculated by summing the APR data fields IV.D5.b (voc\_RcvdRDipNO); IV.D5.c (voc\_RcvdRDipRigPgmNo); IV.D5.e (voc\_Part4CRcvdRSDipNotStdNo) and IV.D5.f (voc\_RcvdHSEquCredNO)—which refer to vocational/trade institutions—and the fields IV.D6.b (prop\_RcvdRDipNO), IV.D6.c (prop\_RcvdRDipRigPgmNo); IV.D6.e (prop\_Part4CRcvdRSDipNotStdNo); and IV.D6.f (prop\_RcvdHSEquCredNO), which refer to proprietary schools among participants who received a secondary school diploma or an alternative secondary school credential during the reporting year.
    - If the grantee did not know the type of institution in which participants enrolled, the institution type was reported as “unknown” in fields IV.D7.b (unk\_RcvdRDipNO); IV.D7.c (unk\_RcvdRDipRigPgmNo); IV.D7.e (unk\_Part4CRcvdRSDipNotStdNo); and IV.D7.f (unk\_RcvdHSEquCredNO).

To calculate the percentage of enrollees within each type of institution, the numbers described above were divided by the total number of college-ready participants who enrolled in postsecondary education (IV.C1 + IV.C2 + IV.C3 + IV.C4).

1. Efficiency Measure

The efficiency measure for the TS program is the gap (difference) between two cost figures: the annual cost per participant with a successful outcome and the annual cost per participant.

* 1. Annual Cost per Successful Participant Outcome

The annual cost per participant with a successful outcome was calculated by dividing the amount of TS funding available to the grantee during the reporting year by the number of participants who experienced a successful outcome. The total amount of TS funding is the amount of funding received by grantees that submitted APR data. The following APR data fields are used to identify successful participant outcomes:

* + - IV.C.i (PSE\_Tot\_d\_h) High school seniors during the reporting year who enrolled in postsecondary education in the subsequent fall term or were notified of deferred enrollment; and
    - IV.A1 (PersistedNextNo) Middle school students or non-senior high school students who persisted in school for the next academic year at the next grade level or graduated from high school.

The program-level cost per successful participant outcome was calculated by dividing the total amount of funding by the number of successful participant outcomes across grantees:

Annual cost per successful outcome = 2020–21 funding / (IV.C.i + IV.A1)

* 1. Annual Cost per Participant

The program-level annual cost per participant was calculated by dividing 2020–21 funding by the total number of participants grantees served within the reporting year (APR data field II.A3 [TotPNO]):

Annual cost per participant = 2020–21 funding / II.A3

* 1. Efficiency Measure

The efficiency measure was calculated by subtracting the annual cost per participant from the annual cost per successful outcome:

Efficiency measure = annual cost per successful outcome – annual cost per participant

1. Please see the definition of “College-Ready Participants” in the Appendix. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)