

What Works Clearinghouse



Talent Development Middle Grades Program

Effectiveness No studies of the *Talent Development Middle Grades Program (TDMG)* that fall within the scope of the Dropout Prevention review protocol meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. The lack of studies meeting WWC evidence standards means that, at this time, the WWC is unable to draw any conclusions based on research about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of *TDMG*.

Program Description¹

TDMG is a whole school reform approach for large middle schools that face serious problems with student attendance, discipline, and academic achievement. The program includes both structural and curriculum reforms. It calls for schools to reorganize into small “learning communities” of 200 to 300 students who attend classes in distinct areas of the school and stay together throughout their time in middle school. In addition to structural changes, schools adopting the program purchase one or more curricula that are intended to be developmentally appropriate and to engage students

with culturally relevant content. For students who are behind in reading and math, the program provides additional periods devoted to these subjects that include group activities and computer-based lessons. To improve implementation, each school is assigned a team of “curriculum coaches” trained by the developer to work with school staff on a weekly basis to implement the program. In addition, teachers are offered professional development training, including monthly sessions designed to familiarize them with the program and demonstrate effective instructional approaches.

The WWC identified 17 studies of *TDMG* that were published or released between 1988 and 2008.

Three studies are within the scope of the review protocol and have an eligible design, but do not meet WWC evidence standards.

- One study does not establish that the comparison group was comparable to the treatment group prior to the start of the intervention.
- One study does not include any outcomes that are defined for students who have dropped out of school. The Dropout Prevention protocol requires that study outcomes be defined for all students, including those who have dropped out of school.

- One study has only one school assigned to each research group, so that the effect of *TDMG* cannot be separated from the effect of the school.

Fourteen studies are out of the scope of the review, as defined by the Dropout Prevention protocol. Two of these studies do not present primary research, and 12 do not examine outcomes within a domain specified in the protocol.

1. The descriptive information for this program was obtained from a publicly-available source: the program’s website (<http://web.jhu.edu/CSOS/tdmg>, downloaded December 2008). The WWC requests developers to review the program description sections for accuracy from their perspective. Further verification of the accuracy of the descriptive information for this program is beyond the scope of this review.

References

Studies that fall outside the Dropout Prevention protocol or do not meet evidence standards

- Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2006). Closing the mathematics achievement gap in high-poverty middle schools: Enablers and constraints. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 11(2), 143–159. The study is ineligible for review because it does not include an outcome within a domain specified in the protocol.
- Balfanz, R., Herzog, L., & Mac Iver, D. J. (2007). Preventing student disengagement and keeping students on the graduation path in urban middle-grades schools: Early identification and effective interventions. *Educational Psychologist*, 42(4), 223–235. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention.
- Balfanz, R., & Mac Iver, D. (2000). Transforming high-poverty urban middle schools into strong learning institutions: Lessons from the first five years of the talent development middle school. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 5(1), 137–158. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention.
- Balfanz, R., Mac Iver, D., & Ryan, D. (2002). Enabling algebra for all with a facilitated instructional program: A case study of a Talent Development Middle School. In V. A. Anfara, & S. L. Stacki (Eds.), *Middle school curriculum, instruction, and assessment: The handbook of research in middle level education series (vol. 2)*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age. The study is ineligible for review because it does not include an outcome within a domain specified in the protocol.
- Herlihy, C. M., & Kemple, J. J. (2004). *The Talent Development Middle School model: Context, components, and initial impacts on students' performance and attendance*. New York, NY: MDRC. The study does not meet WWC evidence standards because it only includes outcomes that are overlapped

with the intervention or measured in a way that is inconsistent with the protocol.

Additional Source

- Herlihy, C. M., & Kemple, J. J. (2005). *The Talent Development Middle School model: Impacts through the 2003–2004 school year. An update to the December 2004 report*. New York, NY: MDRC.
- Mac Iver, D. J., Balfanz, R., Ruby, A., Byrnes, V., Lorentz, S., & Jones, L. (2004). Developing adolescent literacy in high poverty middle schools: The impact of Talent Development's reforms across multiple years and sites. In P. R. Pintrich, & M. L. Maehr (Eds.), *Motivating students, improving school: The legacy of Carol Midgley (Advances in Motivation and Achievement, vol. 13)* (pp. 185–207). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press. The study is ineligible for review because it does not include an outcome within a domain specified in the protocol.
- Mac Iver, D. J., Mac Iver, M. A., Balfanz, R., Plank, S. B., & Ruby, A. (2000). Talent Development Middle Schools: Blueprints and results for a comprehensive whole-school reform model. In M. G. Sanders (Ed.), *Schooling students placed at risk: Research, policy, and practice in the education of poor and minority adolescents*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. The study is ineligible for review because it does not include an outcome within a domain specified in the protocol.
- Mac Iver, D. J., & Plank, S. (1996). *The Talent Development Middle School. Creating a motivational climate conducive to talent development in middle schools: Implementation and effects of student team reading*. Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, Johns Hopkins University & Howard University. The study is ineligible for review because it does not include an outcome within a domain specified in the protocol.
- Mac Iver, D. J., Plank, S., & Balfanz, R. (1997). *Working together to become proficient readers: Early impact of the Talent Development Middle School's student team literature*

References *(continued)*

- program*. Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, Johns Hopkins University & Howard University. The study is ineligible for review because it does not include an outcome within a domain specified in the protocol.
- Mac Iver, D. J., Ruby, A., Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2002). Removed from the list: A comparative longitudinal case study of a reconstitution-eligible school. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 18(3), 259–289. The study does not meet WWC evidence standards because the measures of effect cannot be attributed solely to the intervention—there was only one unit of assignment in one or both conditions.
- Mac Iver, D. J., Ruby, A., Balfanz, R., Jones, L., Sion, F., Garriott, M., et al. (2007). The Talent Development Middle Grades model: A design for improving early adolescents' developmental trajectories in high-poverty schools. In J. Meece, & J. Eccles (Eds.), *Handbook of research on schools, schooling, and development*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. The study does not meet WWC evidence standards because the intervention and comparison groups are not shown to be equivalent at baseline.
- Mac Iver, M. A., & Mac Iver, D. J. (2007). *The impact of comprehensive school reform with NSF-supported mathematics curricula on urban middle grades student mathematics achievement*. Unpublished manuscript. The study is ineligible for review because it does not include an outcome within a domain specified in the protocol.
- Plank, S. B., & Young, E. (2000). *Lessons for scaling up: Evaluations of the Talent Development Middle School's student team literature program*. Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, Johns Hopkins University & Howard University. The study is ineligible for review because it does not include an outcome within a domain specified in the protocol.
- Ruby, A. (2006). Improving science achievement at high-poverty urban middle schools. *Science Education*, 90(6), 1005–1027. The study is ineligible for review because it does not include an outcome within a domain specified in the protocol.
- Useem, E. L. (1998). *Teachers' appraisals of Talent Development Middle School training, materials, and student progress: Results from focus groups*. Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, Johns Hopkins University & Howard University. The study is ineligible for review because it does not include an outcome within a domain specified in the protocol.
- Useem, E. L. (2001). *New teacher staffing and comprehensive middle school reform: Philadelphia's experience*. Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Education Fund. The study is ineligible for review because it does not include an outcome within a domain specified in the protocol.
- Useem, E. L. (2001). *Second-year teachers' experience in Philadelphia's Talent Development Middle Schools*. Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Education Fund. The study is ineligible for review because it does not include an outcome within a domain specified in the protocol.