CUNY Preparatory Transitional High School Program (CUNY Prep)
A Program of the City University of New York

PROGRAM REVIEW SUMMARY

This overview of the CUNY Preparatory Transitional High School Program (CUNY Prep) is based on a program review conducted by Westat/Metis staff for the evaluation of the Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) initiatives. The data were collected between April and August 2008 through interviews with staff of the CEO, the Director and staff at CUNY Prep, and CUNY Central administrators. Additionally, the evaluators reviewed program documents, monthly data reports, and management reports through May 2008.

Sponsoring Agency: The City University of New York (CUNY)

Provider Agency: The City University of New York (CUNY)

Start Date: Day program – September 2003[1]
Evening Program – September 2005

CEO Budget: Since January 2007, CEO has provided $3.5 million annually to be used for both the day and evening programs. CEO funds have allowed the program to strengthen and build the evening program, enhance the college preparatory emphasis, and make improvements to the space.

Goal and Services: The goals of CUNY Prep are to re-engage individuals who have not completed their high school degree in academic experiences that will encourage them to be life-long learners, with the academic, personal, and social skills necessary for higher education, expanded life opportunities, and active participation in community and civic affairs. The program aims to assist out-of-school youth and adults in earning GEDs and, after they pass the exam, prepares them to enter college and stay in college, unlike typical GED programs that end upon completion of the GED.

Statement of Need: There are approximately 165,000 New Yorkers between 16 and 24 years of age who are not in school, working, or looking for work. Half of these disconnected youth have less than a high school diploma.[2]

Target Population: The program is intended to serve on an on-going basis approximately 200 day students ages 16 to 18 and 175 evening students ages 19 and older who have dropped out of high school and have not earned a GED. Additionally, they have to demonstrate an interest in achieving goals and commitment to participate in the program according to the rules.

Eligibility Criteria: In addition to the age requirements, day students must have reading skills at least at the 8th-grade level, and evening students must pass a social studies assessment to be eligible for the program.

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[1] The CUNY Prep program predates the Center for Economic Opportunity. With lack of stable funding and a promising yet untested model, CEO began providing full funding for the program in January 2007. Early evaluation results are made possible because of five years of data documenting outcomes.

[2] Levitan, M., 2005. *Out of School, Out of Work…Out of Luck? New York City's Disconnected Youth*. New York: Community Service Society.

Targets/Outcomes: The program set as key targets that 75 percent of all students who take the GED exam will pass it, at least 50 percent of these students will enroll in college, and at least 50 percent of those enrolled will remain in college for at least two semesters. Table1, based on data supplied by the program, shows the total number of students who took and passed the exam since 2003 in the day and evening programs, respectively. As the table shows, the CUNY Prep day program met the 75 percent GED pass rate target (based on number of students from the cohort who took the GED exam) across all program years. Overall, CUNY Prep pass rates have exceeded the nationwide GED pass rate average of 70 percent. As of June 2008, the evening program has an approximate 63 percent pass rate across the years.

Table 1. Number of CUNY Prep Students Attempting and Passing the GED Exam: Day and Evening Programs[3]

Program	# Students in Cohort	# Attempting GED Exam	% Attempting from Cohort	# Passing GED Exam	% Passing of Attempted
Day Program (2003-2008)	1,462	595	40.7%	454	76.3%
Evening Program (2005-2008)	693	271	39.1%	170	62.7%

Table 2 displays the number and percent of day program students who passed the GED and entered the CUNY system. As Table 2 shows, the 50-percent college enrollment target was met in 2 of the 5 years and is close to being met across the 5 years, which currently shows incomplete 2007-2008 data. In contrast, only 11.5 percent of students in the evening program (41 of the 356 students in evening cohorts C1-C4) have thus far entered the CUNY system.

Table 2. Number of CUNY Prep Students Who Passed the GED and Entered CUNY Colleges: Day Program

Cohorts[4]	# Students who Passed GED	# Students Admitted to CUNY College	% of GED Passers
C1-C3 (2003-2004)	105	60	57.1%
C3A-C6 (2004-2005)	94	66	70.2%
C7-C9 (2005-2006)	101	36	35.6%
C10-C13 (2006-2007)	97	40	41.2%
C14-C17 (2007-2008)*	57	4	7.0%
Total	**454**	**206**	**45.4%**

*Note that 2007-2008 data are incomplete and are shown through March 2008.

[3] Note that 2007-2008 data are incomplete: day program data only go through March 2008 and evening program data go through June 2008.
[4] C=Cohort

Although the program is meeting GED pass rate outcomes and is meeting or close to meeting college enrollment outcomes, college retention outcomes are not currently on target. For example, only about a third of the CUNY Prep students from the day program who went on to enroll in CUNY colleges remained in the CUNY system for a third semester.

Selected Key Findings

Fidelity to the Program Model. Interviews with CUNY Prep administrators, teachers, and counselors indicate that the program has been implemented with fidelity, supplying resources and providing services as specified. The program is dynamic, and resources and activities are continuously being adjusted to meet the perceived needs of the students.

Characteristics of the Clients Served in Comparison to the Target Population. The clients served to date fit the characteristics of the target population. Most students come from the neighborhoods in the Bronx where the school is located. According to the director, approximately 95 percent of students so far have been eligible for free or reduced price school lunches, making them compatible with the low-income criteria set by CEO.

Service Delivery. Both day and evening programs provide supports to enable students to complete their GEDs and enter college, though the evening program has a more direct focus on meeting the requirements of the GED given the limited number of hours they attend classes. The school uses the Diploma Plus model, which is a national model that uses a competency-based approach to instruction. CUNY Prep emphasizes college preparation and readiness throughout students' tenure. After students apply to college and are accepted, CUNY Prep provides follow-up services to track students' progress and to provide support such as tutoring to ensure that they are successful.

Provider Capacity. The program appears to have the capacity to provide resources such as advisement and referrals for counseling and to maintain class sizes of 15-20 students for a student body of approximately 400 students. The CUNY Prep faculty, a key resource, is dedicated to the program's goals and to the students and provides them with personal attention. However, the students seem to need more counseling and emotional support than the program anticipated, and the program cannot meet this need with current resources. Other facilities and services seem to be available in sufficient quantities to meet basic student needs.

Agency Management. CUNY Central recognizes the importance and visibility of CUNY Prep and provides close oversight for CUNY Prep through staff members from Academic Affairs. In addition, the Chancellor is fully aware of the program and its significance.

Early Outcomes. A total of 1,462 students have been admitted to the day program since 2003. Of those, 40.7 percent have attempted the GED exam. Of those who have attempted the GED, 76.3 percent have successfully passed by March 2008. A total of 693 students have been admitted to the evening program since 2005. The GED exam was attempted by 39.1 percent and approximately 62.7 percent of these have successfully passed as of June 2008. Slightly less than half the day students who have completed the GED (45.4%) were reported to have entered college by March 2008, in contrast to only 11.5 percent of evening students, excluding from the base those who first enrolled in the program during 2007-2008. Approximately one-third of CUNY Prep students who enter the CUNY system are retained for at least two semesters.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As implemented, the CUNY Prep program is in alignment with the CEO mission and with key CEO criteria, including that a poverty-level population be served. Staff are energetic and dedicated to achieving the goals of the program. Following are programmatic recommendations.

Focus on Evening Program Improvements. Since the evening program, while still fairly new, is so far behind the day program with respect to achieving its goals, special attention should be paid to investigating the impediments to student success and making programmatic changes as needed. In addition, more data and better alignment with day program data structures should be followed so that progress may be better tracked over the years.

Focus instructional improvement on mathematics. Students tend to score lowest on the mathematics sections of the GED and are likely entering the program with weaker math than literacy skills. In order for students to be successful in college, it is essential to improve their math skills, which may require revamping the math programming to align with student needs.

Consider providing on-site counseling. On-site counseling by a mental health professional might be a valuable resource. Currently students are referred to off-site sources for mental health needs.

Continue to renovate facilities. During the summer of 2008, the school's cafeteria and adjoining space underwent a major renovation, the intent of which was not only to modernize the facilities but also to make it resemble a student center on a college campus. Although these changes have improved the space and facilities are generally adequate to meet most basic needs, faculty felt that additional enhancements (such as child care, dance studio, laboratory facilities, athletics, more computers, and a travel program) would better allow them to serve the students.