



On-Track to Success:

RESEARCH for ACTION

Five-Year Summary of Evaluation Results from Congreso's Éxito™ Program

I. Introduction

Congreso de Latinos Unidos has partnered with Edison High School on the Éxito™ initiative since 2008-09 with the goal of reducing the school's high dropout rate and increasing graduation rates. The program has received support from a variety of funders in its five-year history, including Philadelphia's Department of Human Services (DHS), The Pew Charitable Trusts, Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Philadelphia Youth Network, United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and the Comcast Corporation.

The Éxito™ model has four distinguishing characteristics. In particular, it:

1. Intentionally recruits 9th and 10th grade students who have exhibited one or more of the "Early Warning Indicators" (EWIs) for dropping out of school.² This emphasis on EWIs distinguishes the program from other community-based high school programs in the Philadelphia region.
2. Is operated by Congreso, a neighborhood-based multi-service organization.³ The program model requires that Congreso staff work closely with Edison High School administrators and staff to identify participants and operate the after-school program on school grounds.
3. Offers primary client management support (PCM™), in addition to Homework Help, provided by case managers to students with greater non-academic needs, such as health, housing, and parenting education.
4. Is a pioneer among other community-based high school support programs in both its focus on students with EWIs and its commitment to evaluation. In light of the limited research literature on community-based strategies designed to address high school dropout rates, Éxito's five-year evaluation presents an opportunity to inform the field and contribute to the development of similar initiatives.

Research-Based EWIs for High School Dropout¹

- Failing English or math
- Attending school less than 80% of the time
- Acquiring two or more suspensions

II. Findings

Research for Action (RFA) has evaluated Éxito™ since its inception and has documented student outcomes for the first two cohorts of students who entered the program in 2008 and 2009, respectively.

Students who participated in the Éxito™ program demonstrated promising outcomes. The most notable findings from five years of our Éxito™ evaluation are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Findings

Years One and Two (2008-10)

RFA's student outcomes analysis examined whether Éxito™ students continue to demonstrate EWIs for dropping out of school and found promising outcomes for Éxito™ students in the first two years. Éxito™ students:

- Attended school more frequently than similar students at Edison High School (Years One and Two).
- Were less likely to fail math and English classes than similar students at Edison High School (Year Two).
- Were equally likely to be promoted to the next grade level (Year One).

¹ Neild, R. & Balfanz, R. (2006). Unfulfilled Promise. Project U-Turn, Philadelphia Youth Network: Philadelphia.

² Éxito is open to all students in the school but specifically recruits students with EWIs.

³ Edison is among the lowest performing high schools in Philadelphia. In 2011, more than 80% of students were reported as chronically truant and only 46% of students were on-track to graduation. (School District of Philadelphia Annual School Report, 2011)

Year Three

In Year Three, the analysis focused specifically on Éxito™ participants who entered the program with EWIs. We found that the level of participation mattered for Éxito™ participants with EWIs. These students:

- Attended school more frequently than non-EWI students when they attended Éxito™ at least 34% of the time.
- Were equally likely to pass math and English than non-EWI students if they attended the program frequently—at least 28% of program days for math and 45% of program days for English.
- Were less likely to drop out of school than non-EWI peers when they attended 15% of program days.
- Were equally likely to be on credit level as non-EWI peers when they attended at least 30% of the time.

Year Four

In Year Four, neither cohort of students were still enrolled in Éxito™. Most students were in 11th or 12th grade at Edison. We continued to examine their outcomes and found that Éxito™ alumni:

- Had lower dropout rates than non-participants during the years while enrolled in the Éxito™ program, but their dropout rates increased to a level similar to the comparison group during the years when they were no longer participating in the program.
- Particularly those who attended the program more frequently while enrolled, were more likely than non-participants to graduate from high school in four years.
- Did not have a higher likelihood than non-participants (three years post-program) of attending school more frequently, passing English and/or math, or being on grade level.

Year Five (2012-13)

In Year Five, the Éxito™ program showed promise for graduation and dropout outcomes. Specifically, Éxito™ participants:

- Were more likely to graduate from high school in four or five years than comparison students.
- Were less likely to drop out of school than comparison students.
- Were more likely to graduate the more frequently they participated in school. Level of program participation matters for increasing graduation and reducing dropout.
- Had lower rates of near dropout (i.e., attending school less than 50% of the time) than comparison students during the years they were involved in the program. However, their near dropout rates were the same or higher than comparison students in the years after exiting out of Éxito™.

The evaluation also revealed some limits to Éxito's™ benefits that may stem from the program's early stage of development or constraints of the model.

- The magnitude of the findings are small. While the program was positively related to important outcomes, the modest effect size suggests that the program is one of a number of factors influencing students' choice to stay in school.
- The program did not appear to have an impact on reducing suspensions. This finding may reflect a limitation of the program in impacting student behavioral issues. It may also reflect the fact that the use of suspension varies across schools, or the limitations of using suspensions as the only indicator for student behavior changes.
- The program did not impact overall academic performance and preparedness, as measured by PSSA and Keystone exams. Even though standardized test scores are only one measure of students' academic performance and preparedness, Éxito™ participants scored no better than other students at Edison, perhaps suggesting a programmatic gap in the types of academic supports provided by Éxito™ at an underperforming high school.