RE-ENGAGING YOUTH FOR HIGH SCHOOL SUCCESS:
Findings from the Impact Evaluation of the Good Shepherd Services Transfer School Model

August, 2015—Graduation from high school can have a profound, positive socioeconomic impact on young people's lives and on the communities where they live. For many youth, however, the journey to school success can include periods of setback and the need to overcome significant adversity. For over 30 years, Good Shepherd Services has partnered with the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) to provide alternative pathways to graduation for these students. Good Shepherd Services Transfer schools serve 16-21 year-old over-age, under-credited students. This nationally replicated model aims to provide a safe, supportive learning environment where students can overcome obstacles to their success, explore post-secondary opportunities, and graduate from high school.

Focused on serving students who have fallen behind and are unlikely to graduate from high school before they turn 21, Good Shepherd Services Transfer Schools offer a full-day, year-round academic program that integrates intensive support services and youth development practices with personalized, standards-based instruction. The schools operate under an equal partnership of Good Shepherd Services and NYC DOE leaders.

To contribute to the knowledge base of strategies for re-engaging youth in school and improving academic outcomes, Good Shepherd Services engaged Metis Associates, a national research and consulting firm, to conduct a rigorous evaluation of the Good Shepherd Services Transfer School Model as implemented in South Brooklyn Community High School and West Brooklyn Community High School. South Brooklyn Community High School was New York City's first diploma-granting transfer school, established in 2002; West Brooklyn Community High School was established in 2006. The study examined the implementation of the model during the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 school years and the impact of the model from 2011 through the end of the 2013–2014 school year. Findings from the study show that the Good Shepherd Services Transfer School Model has a significant positive impact on students' graduating from high school as well as on the number of credits students earn and school attendance.
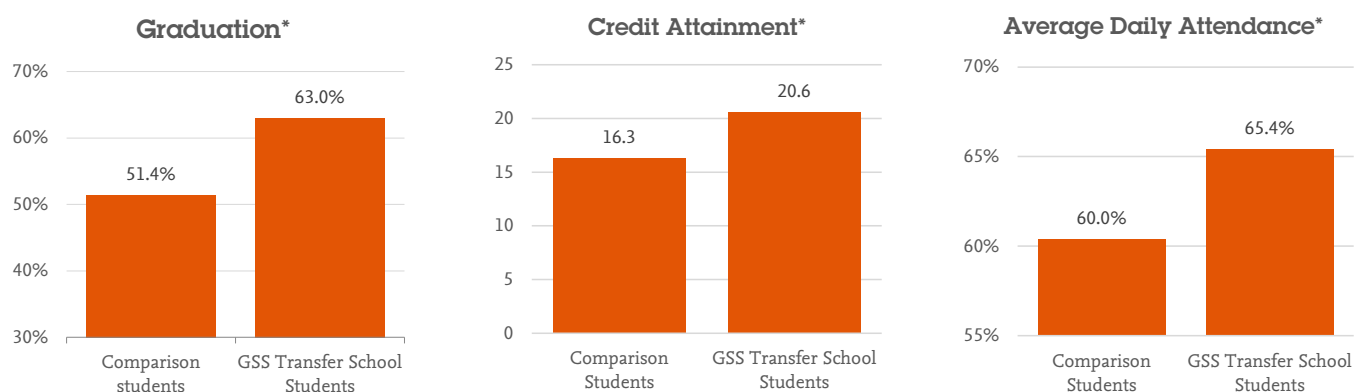
TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD SERVICES TRANSFER SCHOOL MODEL IMPLEMENTED AS DESIGNED?

After a comprehensive review that included interviews, focus groups, surveys, school walk-throughs, and documents and data from Good Shepherd Services and the NYC DOE, the evaluators concluded that the model is being implemented with fidelity at both sites. Implementation findings include:

- **The schools recruit the target population.** Students at both schools have a significant history of truancy with average daily attendance in the year prior to admission of 67%. The comparable rate for all NYC DOE high school students is 85.6%. Students are notably over-age and under-credited. On average, students enter Good Shepherd Services Transfer Schools with 14.8 credits despite being 17 years old, when they would need 30 credits to be on track to graduate. 40% of Good Shepherd students entered with less than 11 credits.
- **Core components of the model are in place.** The evaluators concluded that both sites created a personalized, small school environment with strong relationships between Good Shepherd Services and NYC DOE staff, consistent support to students from advocate counselors, and a range of appropriate youth development and leadership opportunities.

WHAT IMPACT DOES THE GOOD SHEPHERD SERVICES TRANSFER SCHOOL MODEL HAVE ON KEY EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES?

To assess educational outcomes, the evaluators used NYC DOE student and school environment data and an advanced statistical method (Propensity Score Matching) to identify a comparison group of similar students who were not enrolled at Good Shepherd schools. The evaluators determined that students in the Good Shepherd Transfer Schools have a significantly higher chance of graduating. The Good Shepherd Services Transfer School Model also produces significantly better attendance and credit accumulation outcomes. The findings are considered "substantively important" according to the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) guidelines and will be submitted for review. The WWC, an initiative of the Institute for Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education, uses rigorous standards to identify studies that provide reliable and credible evidence of effectiveness of interventions.

Graduation*

Comparison students	51.4%
GSS Transfer School Students	63.0%

Credit Attainment*

Comparison Students	16.3
GSS Transfer School Students	20.6

Average Daily Attendance*

Comparison Students	60.0%
GSS Transfer School Students	65.4%

Statistically significant, p = < .05

- **Good Shepherd students are more likely to graduate, outperforming comparison students by 12 percentage points.** Female students and students who entered Good Shepherd Services Transfer Schools with less than 11 credits— students who have the longest road to graduation—are also more likely to graduate than the comparison group, according to exploratory subgroup analysis.
- **Good Shepherd students earn significantly more credits** (4.3) after enrollment—the equivalent of nearly a full semester of credits. Although the effect was greatest for female students—they earned 5.6 credits more than the comparison group—it was also large for students entering Good Shepherd Services Transfer Schools with fewer than 11 credits; they earned 5.3 credits more than the comparison group after enrollment, according to exploratory subgroup analyses.
- **Good Shepherd Transfer School students have a significantly higher average rate of school attendance**, outperforming comparison students by 5.4 percentage points – equivalent to nearly 10 school days per year. Based on

exploratory subgroup analyses, the effect was greatest for Good Shepherd students with fewer than 11 credits at admission, who had an attendance rate 8.6 percentage points higher than the comparison students. This is a significant finding, as a 2010 Metis study of the New York City Learning to Work program found that students entering transfer schools with fewer than 17 credits were a harder-to-engage population and, ultimately, had a far lower rate of school completion.[1]

WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE?

The Good Shepherd Services Transfer School Model is grounded in developmental theory positing that social and emotional factors are essential to academic learning and achievement. The model requires that each student receive personalized support to build on individual strengths. To gain insight into how social and emotional factors might influence outcomes, the evaluators administered the Developmental Assets Profile (DAP), a validated survey developed by the Search Institute (see insert). A comparison of surveys taken by 75 incoming students before the start and at the end of the 2012-2013 school year indicated that Good Shepherd students significantly increased their constructive use of time. Regression analyses further showed a significant relationship between constructive use of time and academic progress as measured by credit accumulation.

DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS PROFILE (DAP)

The DAP measures external assets (e.g., support provided by family, friends, communities) and internal assets (e.g., skills and values needed to develop character, identity and life skills). Search Institute studies show a correlation between assets, academic achievement, and college and career readiness outcomes. The DAP was administered in fall 2011, spring 2012, fall 2012 (to incoming students) and spring 2013. Seventy-five incoming students completed both a pre- and post- survey.

IMPLICATIONS

The need for a high school model that supports students who are over-age and under-credited, the target for transfer schools, is demonstrated in their large numbers and risk of poor outcomes. A study commissioned by the NYC DOE estimated the number of in- and out-of-school youth who were at least two years behind their expected age and credit accumulation for graduation to be 140,000.[2] Those who remain in school face poor odds for graduation. Over-age students accounted for more than two-thirds of the dropouts of the city's Class of 2013, but only about one in five graduates of that class were over-age.[3] Indeed, the six-year graduation rate for over-age and under-credited students in traditional high schools was only 29%, while across the city at transfer schools, it was 41% (Class of 2012).[4] Youth without a diploma face long odds for economic success. Over the course of a lifetime, high school graduates are estimated to earn approximately $400,000 more than those youth who do not graduate.[5] While much has been written about best practices for serving youth who are not on track to graduate from high school, the evidence from rigorous evaluation studies remains limited. The results from this study indicate that the Good Shepherd Services Transfer School Model is successfully tackling this challenge and helping young people on their path to success.

[1] Metis Associates. (June 2010). Evaluation of New York City's Learning to Work Initiative for Over-Age and Under-Credited High School Youth: Student Outcomes (2005–2008). New York: Metis Associates.

[2]   New York City Department of Education, Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation. (2006, October). *Multiple pathways research and development: Summary findings and strategic solutions for overage, under-credited youth.* Presentation to the New York State Regents, Albany, NY.

[3] New York City Department of Education. (n.d.) The Class of 2013 Four-Year Longitudinal Report and 2012-2013 Event Dropout Rates. Retrieved from http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/data/GraduationDroupoutReports/NYCTraditionalCalc.htm.

[4] New York City Department of Education. (2014). *Unpublished data.*

[5] The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2012). *Youth and work. Restoring teen and young adult connections to opportunity.* Kids Count Policy Report. Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Impact Evaluation Design

Design: To measure the impact of the Good Shepherd Services model, Metis used a rigorous quasi-experimental design, in which outcomes for GSS students were compared to outcomes for equivalent comparison groups selected using Propensity Score Matching (PSM). PSM is an advanced statistical technique considered the best available approach to generating a similar comparable group of non-participants without random assignment. The comparison group comprised over-age and under-credited students enrolled in schools with a similar core educational program and in geographical proximity to the target schools. Comparison group students attended other Brooklyn transfer schools not affiliated with Good Shepherd Services or trained in its model. Guided by the What Works Clearinghouse Procedures and Standards Handbook (v 2.1, 2011), Metis ensured that the matching included important baseline characteristics and limited selection bias.[6]

Sample Available for Matching: 374 students (226 West Brooklyn and 148 South Brooklyn)
- The average student entered the schools with only 14.8 credits despite being 17 years of age.
- 54% male and 46% female
- 67% Hispanic, 15% Black, 12% White, 6% Asian or 'Other'

---

[6] It should be noted that the evaluation does not report findings that compare transfer school students with students who remained in traditional high schools because there is insufficient overlap in the baseline characteristics of these two groups; students remaining in traditional high school are too dissimilar from transfer school students to form comparison group that meets WWC standards for rigor.