

# What Works Clearinghouse



## Talent Search

**Program description** *Talent Search* aims to help low-income and first-generation college students (those whose parents do not have four-year college degrees) complete high school and gain access to college through a combination of services designed to improve academic achievement and increase access to financial aid. Services include test taking and study skills assistance, academic advising, tutoring, career development, college campus visits, and financial aid application assistance.

**Research** Two studies of *Talent Search* met What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards with reservations—one conducted in Texas and another in Florida. Together, the studies included about 5,000 *Talent Search* participants, as well as a comparison sample of more than 70,000 students created through propensity score matching.<sup>1</sup>

**Effectiveness** *Talent Search* was found to have potentially positive effects on completing school.

	<i>Staying in school</i>	<i>Progressing in school</i>	<i>Completing school</i>
<b>Rating of effectiveness</b>	N/A	N/A	Potentially positive effects
<b>Improvement index<sup>2</sup></b>	N/A	N/A	Average: +17 percentile points Range: +14 to +19 percentile points

1. The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.  
 2. These numbers show the average and range of improvement indices for all findings across the two studies.

## Absence of conflict of interest

The *Talent Search* study summarized in this intervention report was prepared by staff of Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR). Because the principal investigator for the WWC dropout prevention review is also an MPR staff member, the study was

rated by staff members from Caliber Associates, who also prepared the intervention report. The report was then reviewed by MPR staff members and by members of the WWC Technical Review Team and external peer reviewers.

## Additional program information

### Developer and contact

*Talent Search* is one of several federal programs established by and funded through the Higher Education Act of 1965. These programs—known as “TRIO programs” because there were originally three of them—are designed to promote college enrollment and completion among low-income students. More information about *Talent Search* can be found at <http://www.ed.gov/programs/triotalent/index.html>.

### Scope of use

Currently, *Talent Search* serves about 380,000 students a year through more than 400 projects sponsored by institutions of higher education, public and private agencies or organizations, and some secondary schools.

### Description of intervention

*Talent Search* aims to promote high school graduation and college enrollment through academic support, exposure to college campuses, and assistance with understanding and accessing

financial aid. The program serves both middle and high school students. *Talent Search* projects must primarily serve students who are low income and whose parents did not complete a four-year college degree. Program services include career exploration and aptitude assessment, tutorial services, information on postsecondary education, exposure to college campuses, counseling, academic advising, information on financial aid, help with completing college admissions and financial aid applications, assistance in preparing for college entrance exams, mentoring programs, and workshops for participants’ families. According to a 2000 survey of project directors, nearly half of *Talent Search* participants received 10 or fewer hours of services a year.

### Cost

In fiscal year 2005, *Talent Search* received approximately \$145 million in federal funding to serve 384,588 participants, for an average cost of \$376 per participant. In some cases, local programs supplement this federal funding with other resources.<sup>3</sup>

## Research

The WWC reviewed seven studies of the effectiveness of *Talent Search*. Three of these studies were included within one research report (Constantine, Seftor, Martin, Silva, & Myers, 2006). Among the three studies in this report, those conducted in Texas and Florida met WWC evidence standards with reservations. The third study included in the Constantine et al. (2006) study—conducted with data from Indiana—did not assess outcomes from any of the three relevant domains for dropout prevention (staying in school, progressing in school, and com-

pleting school). The remaining four *Talent Search* studies did not meet WWC evidence screens.

The Texas study involved 10 *Talent Search* projects (each serving 10–20 high schools) and 4,027 participants, who were matched to 30,842 nonparticipants from the same high schools based on propensity scoring methods that matched students on 18 demographic, socioeconomic, and academic characteristics. The Florida study involved five *Talent Search* projects (each serving 10–20 high schools) and

3. For more detailed budgetary information on *Talent Search* since its inception in 1965, see U.S. Department of Education. (2002). A profile of federal TRIO programs: 2002. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education.

## Research (continued)

900 participants, who were matched to 42,514 nonparticipants from the same high schools using propensity scoring methods that matched students on 13 demographic, socioeconomic, and academic characteristics.<sup>4</sup> For both the Texas and Florida samples, statistical tests found that treatment and comparison

group samples were not statistically different at the 0.05 level on any of the demographic or academic measures used in the matching procedures. In both states, the study focused on participants who were ninth graders in the fall of the 1995–96 school year.

## Effectiveness Findings

The WWC review of interventions for dropout prevention addresses student outcomes in three domains: staying in school, progressing in school, and completing school.

*Completing school.* The Texas and Florida studies examined the program's effects on the likelihood that students received a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate within five years of entering ninth grade. The Texas study indicated that *Talent Search* participants completed school at a significantly higher rate than comparison group students—86% compared with 77%. The Florida study indicated that *Talent Search* participants completed school at a significantly higher rate than comparison group students—84%

compared with 70%. Neither study examined the separate effect of *Talent Search* on receipt of high school diplomas compared with attainment of GED certificates.

## Rating of effectiveness

The WWC rates the effects of an intervention in a given outcome domain as positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness takes into account four factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings,<sup>5</sup> the size of the difference between participants in the intervention condition and the comparison condition, and the consistency in findings across studies (see the [WWC Intervention Rating Scheme](#)).

## The WWC found *Talent Search* to have potentially positive effects on completing school

## Improvement index

The WWC computes an improvement index for each individual finding. In addition, within each outcome domain, the WWC computes an average improvement index for each study and an average improvement index across studies (see [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#)). The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition versus the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison condition. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, the improvement index is entirely based on the size of the effect, regardless of

the statistical significance of the effect, the study design, or the analysis. The improvement index can take on values between -50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting favorable results. The average improvement index for completing school is +17 percentile points across the two studies, with a range of +14 to +19 percentile points across the findings.

## Summary

The WWC reviewed seven studies of the effectiveness of *Talent Search*. Two of these studies met WWC standards with reservations; the others did not meet evidence or relevance standards.

4. Information on the number of high schools per project was obtained by the WWC from the study authors. In both the Florida and Texas analyses, weights were used to account for the closeness of the match (with closer matches receiving a larger weight) and to account for the fact that students in the *Talent Search* group could be matched to more than one comparison student.
5. The level of statistical significance was reported by the study authors or, where necessary, calculated by the WWC to correct for clustering within classrooms or schools and for multiple comparisons. For an explanation, see the [WWC Tutorial on Mismatch](#). See [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#) for the formulas the WWC used to calculate the statistical significance. In the case of *Talent Search*, no corrections for clustering or multiple comparisons were needed.

**The WWC found  
Talent Search to have  
potentially positive  
effects on completing  
school** *(continued)*

Based on the results from the two qualifying studies, the WWC found potentially positive effects of *Talent Search* on completing school. Neither of these studies assessed the program's

effectiveness on staying in school or progressing in school. The evidence presented in this report is limited and may change as new research emerges.

**References**

**Met WWC evidence standards with reservations**

**Texas study included in:**

Constantine, J. M., Seftor, N. S., Martin, E. S., Silva, T., & Myers, D. (2006). A study of the effect of the Talent Search program on secondary and postsecondary outcomes in Florida, Indiana, and Texas: Final report from phase II of the national evaluation. Report prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

**Florida study included in:**

Constantine, J. M., Seftor, N. S., Martin, E. S., Silva, T., & Myers, D. (2006). A study of the effect of the Talent Search program on secondary and postsecondary outcomes in Florida, Indiana, and Texas: Final report from phase II of the national evaluation. Report prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

**Did not meet WWC evidence screens**

Brewer, E. W., & Landers, J. M. (2005). A longitudinal study of the Talent Search program. *Journal of Career Development, 31*, 195–208.<sup>6</sup>

**Indiana study included in:**

Constantine, J. M., Seftor, N. S., Martin, E. S., Silva, T., & Myers, D. (2006). A study of the effect of the Talent Search program on secondary and postsecondary outcomes in Florida, Indiana, and Texas: Final report from phase II of the national evaluation. Report prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.<sup>7</sup>

Franklin, P. (1985). Helping disadvantaged youth and adults enter college: An assessment of two Federal programs. Washington, DC: College Entrance Examination Board.<sup>7</sup>

Green, C. M. (2003). An assessment of the influence of a Talent Search program on the academic and career goals of program participants. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, Wayne State University. (UMI No. 3086430).<sup>7</sup>

Simelton, V. E. (1994). An evaluation of the Educational Talent Search Program at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Arkansas.<sup>7</sup>

**For more information about specific studies and WWC calculations, please see the [WWC Talent Search Technical Appendices](#).**

6. The study does not use a strong causal design: the study used a nonequivalent comparison group.

7. The outcome measures examined are not relevant to this review.