"Project GRAD is **closing the achievement gap.** Individuals and organizations concerned about school reform should follow their example."

—President George W. Bush
West View Elementary School
Knoxville, TN
January 8, 2004

"I met with a group of GRAD Scholars today. It was an **unbelievable experience. GRAD is delivering** the kind of school experience that we need to share with every child in America."

—President Bill Clinton
Malcolm X Shabazz High School
Newark, NJ
November 4, 1999

Contents

Executive Summary 1
The Problem: The Academic Achievement Gaps 5
Why Must These Achievement Gaps be Closed? 6
Efforts to Reduce Achievement Gaps 6
Reform Models 6
The Whole-School or School-By-School Approach 7
District-Wide Reforms 7
Statewide Reform Practices 7
Reform Models' Limited Impact 11
Project GRAD: Working to Close the Achievement Gaps 15
Program Overview 15
Project GRAD's Theory of Change 15
Project GRAD's History 16
Project GRAD's Structure 21
GRAD's Structural Components 21
1. The Feeder System 21
2. The Local Project GRAD Organization 21
3. Project GRAD USA 22
4. Community Involvement and Collaboration 22
5. Employing Existing Assets 22
GRAD's Program Components 23
1. Mathematics 23
2. Literacy 25
3. Classroom Management 26
4. Social Services/Parent Involvement 28
5. The High School Program 30
GRAD High School Core Components 31
The Scholarship Component 31
The Social Services/Parent Involvement Component 32
The Classroom Management Component 32
Academic Initiatives 32
How Formative Data Guide Implementation 37
Structure of the Local GRAD Organization 41
Organizational Structure 41
Component Support Model 41
How GRAD is Being Evaluated 45
Implementation Analysis 47
Student Outcomes and Impact Design 48
Impacts on Other Student Outcomes 48

Evidence Thus Far of Project GRAD's Effectiveness 51
Project GRAD–Houston 51
High School Graduation and College-Going Rates 51
GRAD Scholars 54
Elementary and Middle School Indicators of Progress 54
Expansion Sites 57
How Much Does GRAD Cost to Implement? 61
How Project GRAD Is Being Funded 61
Uses of Funding 61
Project GRAD's Growth and Plans for Expansion 67
Assistance to New Project GRAD Sites 69
Exploratory Phase 69
Development Phase 69
Approval Phase 69
Implementation Phase 70
Conclusion 75
Board of Directors 79
Partners and Supporters 80
Colleges and Universities 81

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Public education is still not serving most of America's at-risk students. Despite important gains made over the past several decades, the academic achievement gap between affluent students and their less fortunate peers is greater today than it was 15 years ago. Currently, only 70 percent of all students in public high schools graduate and this number drops to just 53 percent of students from low-income families.

By the end of fourth grade, low-income students, by various measures, are already two years behind other students. By the time these students reach 8th grade, they are three grade levels behind in reading and math. If they reach 12th grade, low-income and minority students' achievement levels are about four years behind those of other young people.

Low graduation rates are evidence that, in the earlier grades, schools are not meeting the fundamental achievement needs of low-income students. According to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress, often called "the nation's report card,":

- 73 percent of our 47 million public school students are below "proficiency" in reading and mathematics
- 90 percent of our 15 million Black and Hispanic students lack "proficiency" in reading and mathematics
- 50 percent of our 8 million lowest income students lack even "basic" skills at their respective grade levels.

The bottom line should be alarming for all Americans. A very high proportion of our students are leaving public schools unprepared to gain access to our country's economic, social and political opportunities. As we strive to become a nation in which no child is left behind, all U.S. public school students deserve the opportunity to graduate from high school and college.

Despite the grim realities, these gaps can be addressed. Project GRAD is a comprehensive, cost-effective nonprofit education reform program that is currently underway in 12 school districts. It is generating evidence that it can narrow, and even close, achievement gaps at those districts' lowest-performing schools, help more students graduate from high school, and make college a reality. GRAD's goal is to see at least 80 percent of students graduate from high school and 50 percent of those graduates enter and complete college.

Project GRAD works with students across all grades from Kindergarten through college and focuses on improving the quality of the curriculum and teaching, as well as on increasing academic standards for student performance. Project GRAD helps to stabilize the community in which GRAD schools are located through partnerships with parents, colleges and universities, corporations, and faith-based organizations. The mission of the program is to ensure a quality public education for all children in economically disadvantaged communities so that high school graduation rates increase and graduates are prepared to enter and be successful in college.

Project GRAD is currently reaching over 135,000 students in 217 of the most disadvantaged schools. Project GRAD's unit of reform is the feeder pattern; in effect, a sub-system within the larger district. A feeder pattern or feeder system consists of all the elementary and middle schools that "feed" individual high schools.

It is GRAD's theory of change that if an impact is of significant magnitude in an initial individual feeder, GRAD will spread to other low-performing feeders within the district, thereby becoming "systemic," and that GRAD will be sustained because of the results it produces, its low incremental cost, and its broad base of support.

By combining five program components and five structural components, GRAD schools have been independently evaluated to show that they produce:

- Increased student grades and higher achievement test scores
- Decreased disciplinary problems
- Better trained teachers
- More parental involvement
- Greater numbers of high school graduates
- Improved college enrollment rates
- Broader access to financial aid and scholarships
- Increased college graduation rates.

Project GRAD was founded in 1993 by James Ketelsen, former Chairman and CEO of Tenneco, and began working in Houston in the Davis High School feeder pattern of schools. Since that time, this original cluster of schools has increased the number of students:

- Graduating from high school by 85 percent above the national average for low-income students
- Attending college by 400 percent
- Graduating from college at a rate 89 percent higher than that for students from similar backgrounds.

Project GRAD scholars from Davis are now attending universities such as Princeton, Cornell, University of Virginia, Drexel, Rice, Texas A&M, the University of Houston, and the University of Texas.

In addition to increasing high school graduation, college attendance, and even college graduation, data from Houston suggests that GRAD is not only influencing student performance but also stabilizing the communities surrounding GRAD schools. For example, in the Davis feeder pattern of schools in Houston, the student mobility rate has dropped considerably since GRAD was implemented. In the 1992–93 school year, 40 percent of students in Davis feeder schools changed schools at some point during the school year but by the 2000–2001 school year that figure had dropped to 21 percent.

Project GRAD is now in five feeder systems in Houston, serving more than 74 schools and over 50,000 children. Project GRAD has also expanded nationally, with sites in Akron, OH; Atlanta, GA; Brownsville, TX; Columbus, OH; Cincinnati, OH; Houston, TX; Kenai, AK; Knoxville, TN; Lorain, OH: Los Angeles, CA; Newark, NJ; and Roosevelt, NY with more on the way. Additionally, existing Project GRAD sites plan to expand into additional local feeder systems. Nationally, Project GRAD serves 217 schools and over 135,000 students.

In Houston, achievement gaps in GRAD schools in reading and math have been erased or greatly reduced in fewer than eight years. Mounting evidence indicates a number of GRAD expansion cities are on a trajectory to achieve comparable results to Project GRAD in Houston and new sites are also improving student performance and have become infused with new promise. These results, the low incremental costs, and a broad base of support help ensure that GRAD can be sustained over time.

Because of Project GRAD, families are finding new hope in their local schools; teachers are proud of their work and their students; and students are learning, graduating and going to college.

In short, Project GRAD works.

The Problem: The Academic Achievement Gaps

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The most critical problem in American education is clear but complex. By the end of fourth grade, low-income students, by various measures, are already two years behind other students. By the time these students reach 8th grade, they are three grade levels behind in reading and mathematics. If they reach 12th grade, low-income and minority students' achievement levels are about four years behind those of other young people.[1]

Overall, only 70 percent of all students in public high schools graduate and the numbers drop to 51 percent for African-American and 52 percent for Latino students. Of these who do graduate only 32 percent of all students, and less than 20 percent of minority students, graduate high school with the necessary skills to enroll in and complete college. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, over 50 percent of our 8 million lowest-income students lack even basic skills in both reading and mathematics.

Many efforts have been made to narrow or close these achievement gaps. In fact, the U.S. made significant progress during the 1970s and 1980s and cut almost in half the gap that separates low-income students from other youth. As various analysts have noted, this occurred at a time when national education policies were focused on improving equality of opportunity. The War on Poverty was well underway, schools were desegregating, Head Start was expanding, and Title I and other programs were channeling additional funds to the education of low-income children. However, by the mid 1980s, funding cuts were instituted in anti-poverty programs, and the policy emphasis shifted from systemic efforts to help those children most at risk to a focus on assistance to individual students. Consequently, by the late 1980s, the gap stopped shrinking.

Since this time, while low-income students continued to improve in some subjects, there have been only minor fluctuations in the gap, with some widening for certain subjects and grade levels.

Low graduation rates are evidence that, in the earlier grades, schools are not meeting the fundamental achievement needs of low-income students. According to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress, often called "the nation's report card":

- 73 percent of our 47 million public school students are below "proficiency" in reading and mathematics
- 90 percent of our 15 million Black and Hispanic students lack "proficiency" in reading and mathematics
- 50 percent of our 8 million lowest-income students lack even "basic" skills at their respective grade levels.

A recent report from the RAND Corporation concludes that between 1990 and 2000, few states made significant gains on NAEP reading test results. While in mathematics about half the states made some progress, that progress was very small. In sum, RAND reported, "Even if such trends would continue for those states [where there was some gain], it would take decades to close the gaps. And many states show widening gaps." [2]

Despite these statistics, the current situation of lower average test scores for low income students is not an irreversible reality. Many studies have made clear that innate ability is not the reason for the achievement gap. In addition, studies that evaluate student performance on standardized tests have found convincing evidence that the achievement gains among students in the 1970s and 1980s cannot be explained solely by improvements in their family economic conditions.

1 Thinking K-6
2 David W. Grimmer, Ann E. Flanagan, Jennifer H. Kawata, Stephanie Williamson 2000, RAND Report: Improving Student Achievement: What State NAEP Test Scores Tell Us

For example, RAND researcher David Grimmer and his colleagues found that, between 1975 and 1990, African-American students' scores went up by more than twice what improvements in socio-economic factors indicated they would. This finding suggests that socio-economic conditions alone cannot explain the achievement gap. Clearly, cultural influences outside of schools play a part as well. If parents spent more time with their children, if poverty didn't crush so many spirits, if the broader culture did not bombard young people with so many destructive messages, perhaps achievement would be higher. But we cannot ignore the impact of educational policies and practices, particularly as the evidence shows that effective policies and practices can contribute to narrowing the academic achievement gap. Thus, it is clear that it is not the children who are at fault.

Why Must These Achievement Gaps be Closed?

These gaps are everyone's concern. The American workforce is changing, the younger adults who will be responsible for the vitality and competitiveness of the economy in the 21st century are the same students who are now being educated in non-performing schools.

The fundamental nature of the economy has also changed. As a consequence of global competition and advances in technology, many of the good blue-collar jobs the economy generated for most of the last century have largely disappeared. Almost all the jobs that pay enough to support a family now require higher levels of literacy, language fluency, and technical training than in the past. To a greater extent than ever before, educational attainment will determine one's quality of life.

Americans of any ethnicity who do not have a college education or high levels of technical training have little chance to succeed. In a sad break with earlier immigrant experience, surveys indicate that too few of today's immigrants and minorities are staying in school longer than their parents, nor are they earning higher wages. Too many are consigned to lives that offer little hope for a better future. Recent U.S. Census data indicate that there is an increasing salary gap between college and high school graduates. In 1980, college graduates earned 50 percent more than high school graduates and by 2000 that percentage increased to 111 percent.[3]

On a positive note, minority communities are becoming more powerful and more insistent on full participation as equal partners in making the collective decisions that will shape the evolution of the economy and culture. Thus, the need for a solution to this problem of academic achievement has new urgency. Here, in the increasingly diverse United States, as the relationship between educational success and social and economic opportunity steadily manifests itself, it is essential that we seek remedies to education inequality.

Efforts to Reduce Achievement Gaps

Reform Models

It is now widely recognized that schools, communities, and families must be committed to the achievement of all children, must begin educating them when they are very young, and must make a long-term commitment to educational improvement. Creating an overall atmosphere for a child

3 Note: U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, 2001

that reflects these principles is becoming a national priority, and a wide range of supportive resources are being deployed. Programs that seek to reform the way children are taught fall broadly into three categories.

The Whole-School or School-By-School Approach

The assumption of this approach is that in order to effect change, a reform model needs to work from the ground up and with individual schools. Some think this is the most realistic way to proceed because attempting to work with more than individual schools is too complex. Supporters of the school-by-school approach reason that, ultimately, if enough individual schools get turned around, school district-wide reform will follow. Teachers and educators are most often in the center of this process and work with community and parent partners. Generally, this approach is process-oriented although some initiatives have both specific content and methodologies to offer. Examples of programs that follow these principles are: Accelerated Schools, National School Development Corporation models, Charter Schools, CRESPAR, the Small Schools movement (New Visions in New York City, the Annenberg Challenge), and for-profit ventures such as the Edison Project.[4]

District-Wide Reforms

These approaches focus on reform strategies set at the district level and are frequently governance centered and thus, at the school level, are implemented by site-based management teams. Often, each school forms a leadership team made up of administrators, teachers, community members, and parents. The team is charged with selecting a reform plan for its school. In some cases, the district superintendent requires that each school select a whole-school reform model from a limited list of options. This list is generally made up of reform models that are considered to be "research based," meaning that there is some objective evidence that they have the potential to be effective in enhancing student achievement. One of the best examples of the district-wide governance-based approach can be found in Chicago. Memphis is an example of a school district where limited choices of research-based models were offered to individual schools.

State-Wide Reform Practices

Virtually all of the state-wide reform programs are standards-based. The state stipulates standards that the districts and individual schools are then required to follow. How each reaches the standards, which guide practice in terms of expected outcomes by subject or skills area, is left up to the district and individual schools. The standards are enforced through state-wide testing. Examples of this approach can be found in Texas and North Carolina. One of the principles of President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" initiative is to implement state-imposed standards. In some states, New Jersey for example, a court order has been issued mandating equal funding across districts in the state. When the courts become involved, it is often the case that the state stipulates and lists whole-school reform models that it will accept and fund. In other instances, the courts not only require equality of opportunity (every student must be in an environment where "research based" practices are employed) but the court also monitors student achievement data to be sure the outcomes are also equal. Court-ordered reform work underway for more than a decade in Kentucky is being closely watched by educators and policy makers, as are efforts in Alabama and New Jersey.

4 Note: A related and widely debated reform strategy involves providing vouchers to low-income students so they can "buy themselves out" of the public school system. Vouchers' theory of change asserts that not only will they provide enhanced opportunities for individual students but the very existence of vouchers as an option for families will put competitive pressure on public schools to improve the quality of their practice.

The Educators' Guide to School-Wide Reform prepared by the American Institutes for Research and published by the Educational Research Service in 1999 provides a detailed description of 24 approaches to school-wide reform. *The Guide* also cites what evidence there is about each approach's effectiveness. While several other reports catalog available school-wide approaches, and some even provide limited evaluations, this document is one of the few that rates the approaches against a common set of standards or compares them to one another in terms of cost and reliable data. The reform models summarized in *The Guide* are diverse, with one introduced in 1966 and the most recent program begun in 1998. Of the 24 models, the following eight showed strong or promising evidence of positive effects on student achievement:

- Direct Instruction (K–6)
- High Schools That Work (9–12)
- Success For All (Pre-K–6)
- Community for Learning (K–12)
- Different Ways of Knowing (K–7)
- Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (K–12)
- School Development Program (K–12).

In addition, six had marginal evidence of positive effects on student achievement; two exhibited evidence of mixed, weak, or no effects on student achievement; and eight had not done research on the effects of the program on student achievement. The number of schools implementing any one of the models ranged from 10 to 1,130.

The Overview to *The Guide* states, "Even though many of the twenty-four approaches have been in schools for years, only three provide strong evidence of positive effects on student achievement. As a result, educators often are considering school-wide reform without vital information on which to make decisions. More rigorous evaluations are needed, with broad dissemination of findings."

Reform Models' Limited Impact

Reform Models' Limited Impact

Past experience and research suggest that in order to close the academic achievement gap policy needs to encourage and support effective and consistent reform throughout the entire K–16 system. Students move through this system; and if they encounter effective practices at just specific grade levels or, if particularly fortunate, in a single school, considering the circumstances in their lives, children from low-income backgrounds are unlikely to achieve long-term academic success.

In addition, in most low-income communities children are in motion both vertically (from grade to grade) and horizontally (from one elementary school to another, from one middle school to another). In fact, this horizontal movement (called "student mobility" by educators) can affect up to 50 percent of students each year. This means in any given school, 50 percent of the children who begin the school year in a particular school will be in another school by the end of that academic year. This is a daunting challenge for teachers. They experience a constant churning of their student bodies. And since in schools with disproportionate numbers of inexperienced and under-credentialed teachers, the problem of providing a high quality educational experience for children in horizontal motion is compounded. Further, since these children often do not have the family and community support systems that middle class students have, they are less able to negotiate the changes as they encounter a continuously shifting spectrum of curricular and support structures and "reform" efforts. To illustrate, in one grade or school students may be taught reading in a "whole language" environment but at the next grade level or the next school, they may encounter a "phonics-centered" approach.

As educators will tell you, their task is made more difficult by the constant stream of reforms that arrive at their schools as principals and district superintendents come and go. Teachers have devised ways to survive this flux, but too few children from low-income backgrounds are so fortunate.

Historically, practitioners, policy makers, and funders have looked for answers in programs that offer the simplest approach to close the achievement gap. In many ways this makes sense—maybe there is a Silver Bullet. Because the number of under-achieving children is enormous (perhaps as many as 15 million in the United States), large sums of money have been directed in a piecemeal way to programs of this kind. Unfortunately, most have failed to bring about systemic change. While many stakeholders are genuinely concerned about the problem of inequality, they have sought sharply delineated solutions in an effort to find cost-effective ways that yield quick results. Considering the limited number of effective reform efforts that are working at scale, the competition among the models that claim to be effective even in the absence of strong evidence, and the current goal to leave no child behind, it has proven difficult to agree on the most appropriate approaches to invest in that can be replicated successfully at scale and at sustainable cost. Our best efforts to date, including Head Start, Title I, TRIO, Gear-Up, mentoring, and after-school programs, are helping but are not enough to make a significant dent in the achievement gaps.

Results are fleeting because programs do not sufficiently speak to the realities of how students experience schooling. The problems are clear. First, even if a particular approach to school reform can transform individual schools and thereby produce measurable evidence of improvement in student achievement, these schools are insufficiently available to at-risk students. Most successfully reformed schools are not serving the lowest income students. Second, in those cases where low-income students do gain access to transformed schools, the sad reality is that the majority do not attend long enough to reap the benefit because so many of the families move before their children can complete their studies at

that Project GRAD school—again, because of horizontal movement. (This is particularly true at charter schools and in situations where students are using vouchers and thus may be responsible for the mixed results of these efforts.) Finally, even students who are able to remain in a reformed elementary school are usually destined to move on to a dysfunctional middle or high school where much of their academic gains dissipate.

To date, policy and funding strategies have failed to take these realities sufficiently into account. Practitioners are instead encouraged to look for short-term answers because efforts that promote structural changes and take longer to become sustainable have not been supported financially for the amount of time it takes to achieve results.

Funding short-term interventions has also done more than provide ineffective solutions for children. It has, inadvertently, created powerful ancillary education and youth service industries. Entire public sector industries have been built up around various strategies and approaches—early childhood education; youth development; Title I; teacher education; standards and testing; after-school programs; small school, home school, and whole school reform; bilingual education; to name a few. All make claims on limited resources; all promise what they can deliver. Few have real evidence that they work. As with all industries, each has its own constituency, advocates, work forces, unions, and long-term strategy. The segmented structure of the Department of Education, the programmatic nature of federal legislation, and the targeted strategies of private and corporate philanthropy result in the identification and funding of overly specific initiatives that feed these industries and make them stronger. Yet the achievement gaps persist.

Reform programs should concentrate on initiatives that relate to the real ways in which students experience schooling. Specifically, this means encouraging the interconnection of important but still piecemeal programs and using the "pipeline" or "pathway" as the guiding metaphor. As students move through the education pipeline, there needs to be a series of overlapping interventions that cut across grades and sectors, particularly when students are developing the critical skills in mathematics, reading, and language arts. Support can be directed to consistent, comprehensive reform within sub-systems of schools by concentrating on feeder patterns of elementary schools that connect to middle schools which in turn "feed" high schools. This will assure that as students move horizontally and vertically, their experience is consistent and coherent.

Programs that seek to close the achievement gaps must work in practice, and the results must be measured not only by outcome measures, but also by data about impact. The most important question to be answered in school reform efforts is the following: Are they making a measurable difference or, essentially, do they work?

If we are serious about educating our children, we seem to have a window of opportunity to take action. Republicans and Democrats agree more than ever on an education agenda that sees closing the achievement gaps as the nation's top education priority. They are also in agreement about the essential need to provide a genuine quality education for all students; and President Bush has identified the right to read as a civil right.

Project GRAD: Working to Close the Achievement Gaps

Project GRAD: Working to Close the Achievement Gaps

Program Overview

Project GRAD is a comprehensive, nonprofit, cost-effective reform model that is currently underway in 12 school districts. It is generating evidence that it can narrow and perhaps even close the achievement gaps at those districts' lowest-performing schools. GRAD's goal is to see at least 80 percent of students graduate from high school and 50 percent of these graduates enter college. Project GRAD works across all grades from K through 16 and focuses on improving the quality of the curriculum and teaching, as well as on increasing academic standards for student performance. Project GRAD helps to stabilize the community in which GRAD schools are located through partnerships with parents, colleges and universities, corporations, and faith-based organizations. The mission of the program is to ensure a quality public education for all students in economically disadvantaged communities so that high school graduation rates increase and graduates are prepared to enter and be successful in college.

Project GRAD's Theory of Change

Project GRAD's unit of reform is the feeder pattern; in effect, a sub-system within the larger district. A feeder pattern or feeder system consists of all elementary and middle schools that "feed" individual high schools. There are no airtight feeder systems because of student mobility, but most school districts are more or less organized in feeder patterns. Project GRAD serves all schools in low-performing feeder systems, typically seven to 15 interconnected elementary, middle, and high schools that serve 5,000–20,000 students. GRAD combines specific evidence-based curricular and student and family service components into a coherent educational experience for students and school staff. It brings these approaches to all the schools in a feeder and provides the resources necessary to help the existing teacher corps become proficient in their implementation. In addition, to make college enrollment and completion more realistic for typically low-aspiring students, GRAD offers college guidance and scholarships. GRAD is implemented through a partnership between the school district and an independent local GRAD entity that provides resources and technical assistance. An external evaluation that tracks student progress also tracks evidence of GRAD's impact.

It is GRAD's theory of change that if an impact is of significant magnitude in an initial individual feeder, GRAD will spread to other low-performing feeders within the district, thereby becoming "systemic," and that GRAD will be sustained because of the results it produces, its low incremental cost, and its broad base of support. It is not known as yet how many feeders in a school district need to implement GRAD before it can be claimed that systemic change has occurred. Critical mass for sustainability might be five to six feeders in a district the size of Houston (GRAD in Houston is currently being implemented by five feeders) or as few as three in smaller districts.

GRAD requires that the staffs of all schools in a feeder vote to adopt, be trained in, and implement the same approaches to the teaching of reading, mathematics, and classroom management in all schools at all grade levels. This contributes to a comprehensive and coherent educational experience for all students as they move from grade to grade and from school to school—even horizontally across elementary or middle schools. Through the implementation of its program or curricular components, GRAD provides a core of basic skills that becomes the platform for high academic standards on which schools can build challenging curricula in the humanities, science, technology, the social sciences, and the arts.

GRAD works with existing assets: the schools as they are, existing principals and teachers, and current work rules. No one is forced to leave; the basic organizational structures remain intact. And GRAD is not a series of charter schools. GRAD's major investment is in the professional development of teachers, administrators, and parents, all of whom learn to implement proven approaches to teaching mathematics, reading, and classroom management. In addition, GRAD brings social services/parent involvement to its schools and provides supplemental resources to assist teachers with the implementation of GRAD's components.

GRAD establishes a local Project GRAD entity, Project GRAD Houston or Project GRAD Los Angeles, for example, to steer GRAD and provide resources for its implementation. With its own board of leading citizens (educators often including the district superintendent, funders and community and corporate leaders) standing apart from but working in partnership with the school district, the local GRAD organization provides a consistent voice advocating and supporting GRAD's implementation over time, straddling changes in district and school leadership. The local GRAD entity receives and controls the distribution of externally raised funds for GRAD's implementation and quality control.

GRAD's impact is measured through "hard data" and is contrasted with results in demographically equivalent comparison schools, changes in student achievement on state and nationally-normed tests, high school graduation rates, college-going and graduation rates, and changes in student behavior and school culture. From experience, by the end of two to three years of implementation, in most feeders, GRAD produces evidence of the beginnings of measurable impact on student achievement. This achievement is catalytic because school staff, parents, corporate, and other community leaders and constituents find GRAD's approach to be promising. This motivates them to offer increasing levels of support. They see GRAD to be evidence-driven, producing results in student achievement and behavior relatively quickly, and leading to a school and academic environment conducive to high achievement that looks and feels like "real school," qualities researchers of education reform have found to be essential if change is to occur and be sustained.

Project GRAD's History

Project GRAD began in Houston and was founded by James Ketelsen, then Tenneco's Chairman and CEO. Beginning in 1988, Tenneco funded a four-year college scholarship program, the Tenneco Presidential Scholarship Program, to eligible graduates of Davis High School, at the time Houston's lowest-performing high school. By 1991–92, the number of Davis graduates entering college had more than quadrupled, but Ketelsen was frustrated since this was still far from the goal—ultimately having 40 percent of entering 9th graders enrolling in college. And there was little or no change in SAT or ACT scores. The scholarship program was not having a large enough impact on the dropout rate. Sadly, it appeared that 9th grade was too late to reach most students.

It then became apparent that if the program were to reach its ambitious goals, it would be necessary to develop and implement a comprehensive set of interventions that would begin in kindergarten (or even before) and span all the grades through the 12th. This led to the development of the full Project GRAD model.

When Jim Ketelsen retired from Tenneco in 1992, he spearheaded a search for a solution to the challenges facing Houston's inner city schools. With associates, he looked for curricular, methodological,

and student and family support programs that would help build basic skills, improve student behavior, and catch children before they found themselves at risk of dropping out. This search identified four program components that were added to the already-existing scholarship program. In 1993, principals and teachers voted to adopt these components in the elementary and middle schools that send students to Davis High School in Houston's Near North Side.

Under Ketelsen's leadership, Project GRAD has expanded to a total of five feeder systems in Houston. In GRAD's original cluster of schools:

- The number of high school graduates has increased by 85 percent
- The number of students going to college has increased by 400 percent
- Graduates are completing college at a rate that is 89 percent higher than the national average for low-income students.

Project GRAD has also expanded nationally, with sites in Akron, OH; Atlanta, GA; Brownsville, TX; Columbus, OH; Cincinnati, OH; Houston, TX; Kenai, AK; Knoxville, TN; Lorain, OH; Los Angeles, CA; Newark, NJ; and Roosevelt, NY with more on the way. Nationally, Project GRAD currently serves more than 135,000 children in 217 schools.

After more than 10 years of experience, it is clear that Project GRAD schools produce:

- Students with better grades and higher achievement test scores
- Students with positive attitudes and improved classroom behavior
- Teachers with better training and ongoing support
- Parents with more direct involvement in their children's education
- High school graduates with higher college enrollment rates
- College students with greater access to financial aid and scholarships
- Increased college graduation rates.

Project GRAD's Structure

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Project GRAD consists of five program components that are implemented within an organizational structure that also has five elements. As indicated, GRAD's theory of change asserts that education reform efforts should improve approaches to the teaching of basic skills and a strong academic program. These, in turn, should be implemented via a structure that has the potential to lead to sustainable systemic change, as any gains that accrue via add-on programs or topical approaches are likely to be short-lived and will lead to disappointment and even cynicism.

GRAD's Structural Components

Project GRAD's structural components provide a context for the implementation of its five program elements:

1. The Feeder System
2. The Local Project GRAD Organization
3. Project GRAD USA
4. Community Involvement and Collaboration
5. Employing Existing Assets

1. The Feeder System

A feeder system consists of a high school and all the middle and elementary schools that send or "feed" students to it. By implementing common approaches to the curriculum and the way it is taught within a feeder, Project GRAD provides academic consistency in two important ways:

- It makes vertical consistency possible as children advance from grade to grade within a feeder and provides horizontal consistency across grades within a feeder, minimizing the disruption experienced by children whose families change homes within the same neighborhood during the school year.
- Working within feeders also makes it possible to provide a comprehensive educational experience to children in that there is an aggregated effect to offering all the program components, at all grade levels, in all the schools in which students are likely to enroll.

2. The Local Project GRAD Organization

In each city, an independent nonprofit organization is established to oversee the implementation of Project GRAD by working with the program component providers, the feeder schools, the school district, and the local community. This local Project GRAD organization assures program quality and consistency over an extended period of time and during turnover of superintendents, principals and teachers. It also promotes program awareness to all local GRAD constituencies. And it mobilizes resources that are deployed in the GRAD schools, provides technical assistance to the schools as they work to implement GRAD, and serves as a kind of "swat team" that can at times respond quicker to problems that arise than the slower-moving school bureaucracies.

3. Project GRAD USA

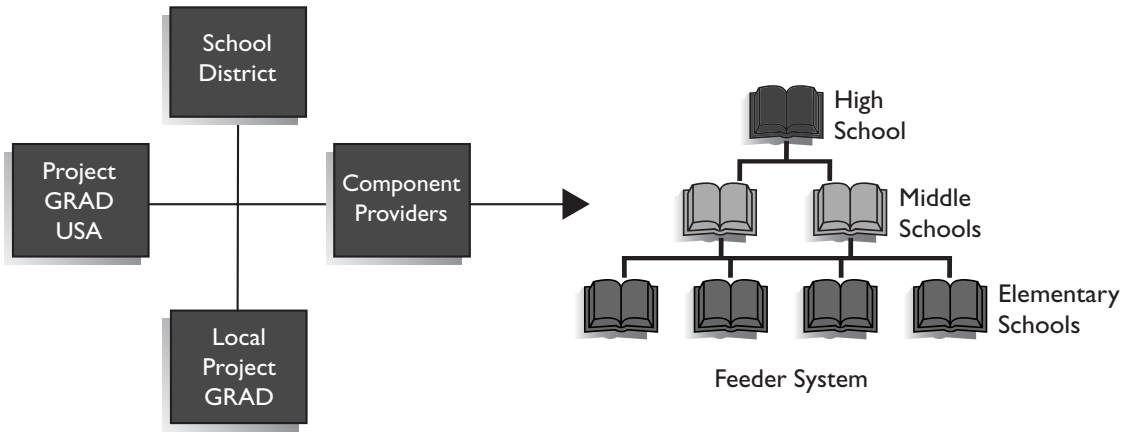
GRAD USA is a national organization that provides technical assistance, quality assurance, and some funding for all Project GRAD sites. GRAD USA works closely with a city when it is considering GRAD, helping it to develop a plan of action and mobilize local support. During the first years of implementation, GRAD USA works as a partner with the local GRAD organization as it leads the process of bringing GRAD to its school district. GRAD USA also organizes opportunities for all the sites to learn from each other's practices and helps sites adapt GRAD to their local contexts. It works as well with the program component suppliers to assure their curricular approaches align with state standards and that the components are coordinated so as to lead to the maximum aggregated effect.

4. Community Involvement and Collaboration

Project GRAD provides an avenue for local corporations, foundations, universities, and concerned individuals to contribute to the success of public school students in their communities. This is achieved through financial contributions as well as through direct involvement, including mentoring, tutoring, and event sponsorship. The school level stability and momentum that Project GRAD generates also attracts resources and participation from other local school-based programs and initiatives that see a greater likelihood of program success in GRAD schools. In this role, GRAD serves as a platform for the addition of targeted approaches to assisting students. They are thereby less likely in this situation to stand or fall on their own.

5. Employing Existing Assets

In each city, Project GRAD commits to working with existing students, teachers, and administrators. Project GRAD does not attempt to select students for its schools or "push out" teachers or administrators. Instead, Project GRAD provides intensive training and support to in-service teachers and administrators to equip them to succeed in their work with their children. It is GRAD's view that unless it is able to work effectively with current educators there is no possibility it can work at scale. The realities of inner-city schools include the fact that many, if not most, teachers are under credentialed and relatively inexperienced. Unfortunately, this reality is unlikely to change. Thus, to narrow the achievement gap for large numbers of students, it is necessary to work effectively with what exists.



GRAD's Program Components

Project GRAD's instructional model focuses on implementing the following interdependent and mutually reinforcing components in all the schools in a feeder system:

1. Mathematics
2. Literacy
3. Classroom Management
4. Social Services/Parent Involvement
5. The High School Program

1. Mathematics

At the heart of the Project GRAD Mathematics component is a mathematics system for teaching and learning that promotes a balance between students' understanding of mathematics concepts and students' computational fluency in grades K–8. Project GRAD Mathematics focuses on student discovery, reasoning, and communication, so that mathematical concepts are understood and articulated by students. Students also develop a fluency in the facts and procedures of mathematics. Most importantly, students are prepared to proceed to the next grade level with the confidence and skills necessary to move through the curriculum with a foundation based upon understanding rather than memorization. Furthermore, Project GRAD Mathematics instruction incorporates a well articulated algebra strand at every grade level to insure students' preparation for higher level mathematics courses during high school and beyond. Other features of the Project GRAD mathematics component include alignment of the instructional program to state and local standards, teacher resources, professional development of teachers and instructional support personnel, and instructional support.

The basic goals of Project GRAD Mathematics are to encourage all students to:

- Want to learn mathematics
- Learn to value mathematics
- Become confident in their ability to do mathematics
- Learn to communicate mathematically
- Learn to reason mathematically
- Become successful mathematical problem solvers
- Master basic skills, eliminating the need for remediation every year as students move on.

The Project GRAD Mathematics system of teaching and learning is organized around the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Principles and Standards and uses carefully selected manipulatives to foster the understanding of concepts and processes in mathematics. There is emphasis on problem solving and student articulation of mathematical ideas in Project GRAD Mathematics classrooms. In response to varied learning styles and experiences of students, differentiated instruction is a critical component of the daily instructional sequence. Implementation of the Project GRAD Mathematics component has resulted in significant improvements in student performance in mathematics, student and teacher interest in mathematics, increased enrollment in upper level courses in high school mathematics classes, and improved student discipline and attendance.

Additional features of Project GRAD Mathematics instruction include:

- Introduction of algebra in the early grades
- Use of children's literature and science to give meaning and purpose to mathematics
- Utilization of all instructional resources mandated by the district
- Student discovery of the rules of mathematics through pattern examination
- Flexibility and acceptance of alternative ways of problem solving
- Early success in computational fluency
- Encouragement of a consistent mathematics instructional period for grades one through eight.

The Project GRAD Mathematics component provides extensive teacher professional development beginning with an initial 20-hour instructional block focused on mathematical content. Comprehensive professional development takes place throughout the school year. Teachers come together to plan as grade level teams and reflect on student work, benchmark student performance data, and evaluate their own teaching practices. Each school and each classroom within the school is supplied with resources to support and enhance the teaching of mathematics.

Three levels of extensive support are dedicated to Project GRAD Mathematics instruction. At the local GRAD site level, support personnel, titled Project GRAD Mathematics Instructional Intermediaries, have been selected from the ranks of excellent mathematics teachers. Intermediaries support teachers at each school a minimum of one day per week. Project GRAD school-based Facilitators are also exemplary mathematics teachers and serve as materials and resources managers, leaders, and key contacts for their schools regarding issues of program implementation. The Facilitators continue as full-time teachers and receive extra duty pay for work beyond their contractual day. In coordination with the Project GRAD social services/parent involvement initiative, Project GRAD Mathematics Instructional Intermediaries and school-based Facilitators design and implement Family Math Nights. Family Math Nights encourage parental and family involvement in children's learning and assist parents in helping their children reach grade-level goals.

The work of local Project GRAD Instructional Intermediaries and Facilitators is supported by the GRAD USA Mathematics Team. The GRAD USA Mathematics Team provides awareness sessions, initial and refresher teacher training, grade-level teaching plans, Instructional Intermediary and Facilitator professional development for the purposes of building infrastructure, implementation visits, benchmark testing and analysis as requested, and logistical support for acquisition of materials. The Project GRAD USA Mathematics Team assists local Project GRAD organizations and local school districts to align existing resources and initiatives for the improvement of mathematics instruction and students' mathematics achievement.

The program which best exemplifies the Project GRAD approach is the MOVE IT Math™ (MIM) program. MOVE IT Math™ has been recognized by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (serving Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico) as one of the five "Best Practices" in mathematics in its five state region, the only one in this group serving elementary schools. Since 1995, all schools implementing MOVE IT Math™ have shown significant improvements in student performance in mathematics. Project GRAD Mathematics also supports implementation of the Everyday Mathematics™ curriculum.

2. Literacy

Project GRAD's focus in literacy is on supporting the teaching of reading at the elementary level to ensure reading success for every student. Also, reading support extends through the middle grades for students still not reading at grade level. Project GRAD's reading component provides a balanced approach to reading by incorporating strategies of decoding, fluency, and comprehension, which can be delivered in both English and Spanish, as needed. Philosophically, the GRAD-supported program focuses on prevention, early intervention, and acceleration, to ensure that students have every opportunity to move ahead in their reading achievement.

Learning problems are reduced by providing students with a sound classroom program and by engaging parents in support of their children's school success. When learning problems are encountered, corrective interventions are immediate, intensive, and minimally disruptive to students' progress in the regular program. Students receive intensive help when their problems are small and then do not fall behind or require remedial instruction in later grades.

Project GRAD facilitates implementation of the literacy component with three levels of support:

- Full-time, school-based Reading Facilitators, who monitor classroom activities, provide coaching, conduct at least monthly meetings of implementing teachers to share best practices and to troubleshoot problems, lead assessment and placement activities, and oversee tutoring
- Local GRAD site Literacy Consultants assigned to specific schools and led by a Reading Manager for the site, who provide oversight and additional coaching and training
- Vendor Consultants, who provide training and materials from the national program vendor.

Additional support and guidance are provided by GRAD USA. This ongoing staff development and support are keys to the success of such a program. All teachers complete an initial training, attend annual refresher sessions held by the local Project GRAD literacy staff, and attend at least monthly literacy meetings, in addition to the individual coaching previously described.

Alignment of the component with state and district standards is crucial. The Project GRAD Literacy Manager, Consultants, and the school-based Facilitators ensure that the state/district curricula and standardized and criterion-referenced test objectives are aligned with daily instruction. It is also their responsibility to monitor student progress in relation to district goals and tests. Project GRAD school administrators meet regularly to discuss improved implementation and data analysis.

Success for All (SFA) is the reading program in most GRAD schools. SFA is a research-based reading program for students in grades Pre-K–5, which also provides supports in the middle school grades for students performing below grade level. Key elements in the SFA reading program are the following:

- Offers a daily uninterrupted block of reading instruction of at least 90 minutes, in addition to other language arts instruction in language and writing
- Requires at least 20 minutes of additional reading practice per day, which may be homework
- Supplies daily one-to-one tutorials for the following minimum percentages of students functioning at the lowest level on their grade levels: grade 1: 30%; grade 2: 20%; grade 3: 10%
- Uses flexible, homogeneous groupings in which instruction is matched to the students' reading levels and delivered through cooperative learning and active student involvement
- Employs a set of systematic assessments for regrouping multiple times during the year
- Accelerates students through the reading levels at their own pace.

Parent involvement is a key element for student success in reading. A primary vehicle for this parent involvement in SFA is the Literacy Family Support Team, a committee composed of the school-based social services/parent involvement provider and other lead teachers and administrators in the building. The committee has regular meetings in which it develops school-wide plans to reduce problems impeding reading progress as well as studying specific needs of individual students demonstrating difficulty. Parents are enlisted in the planning and implementation of activities to meet individual student needs. A decrease in special education referrals is a testimony to the impact of the early intervention of this group. Also, through the Project GRAD parent and community involvement initiative, parents are encouraged to attend Second Cup of Coffee meetings and/or Raising Readers Workshops, where they learn strategies for supporting their young readers. These meetings are hosted by the school-based social services/parent involvement provider in concert with the school-based literacy facilitator, with the support of the local Project GRAD literacy consultant.

SFA was developed in 1986 by a team led by Dr. Robert Slavin at John Hopkins University. Since the initial piloting, SFA has expanded to more than 1,800 schools in 40 states across the United States. Studies of SFA, involving more than 75 SFA and 75 control schools over periods of up to seven years have been conducted in inner city, suburban, and rural schools. Third-party evaluations by the state of Tennessee and ABT Associates have found positive effects on standardized measures as well as on numerous school district evaluations.[5] A meta-analysis of research on 29 comprehensive reform models by Borman, et al. (2003) categorized Success for All as one of only three programs with "Strongest Evidence of Effectiveness" based on research quality, quantity, and impact.

3. Classroom Management

Effective classroom management is a key component of the GRAD roll-out in each school.

Project GRAD supports implementation of the Classroom Management component through three levels of on-going training and support provided by school-based coach/facilitators, local site Project GRAD consultants, and national vendor training consultants. Local Project GRAD consultants, under the guidance of a Project GRAD manager, regularly visit campuses to observe classes, demonstrate lessons incorporating key strategies, conduct student and teacher surveys, help teachers to plan lessons, and participate in observations. By the end of the first year, the local consultants oversee new teacher training and refresher sessions, with assistance from the national vendor staff. While the national vendor staff members continue to monitor program data, after the implementation period, responsibility for the program shifts to the local site. School Coach/Facilitators conduct new teacher training, act as leaders and key contacts for issues regarding school-wide motivational programs, and assist teachers in strategy implementation. These Coach/Facilitators are full-time teachers who receive extra duty pay for the work beyond their contractual day.

Project GRAD schools use Consistency Management & Cooperative Discipline^{SM} (CMCD^{SM}) which is a research-based instructional discipline management system that combines consistency in classroom organization with student self-discipline. CMCD^{SM} builds shared responsibility for learning and classroom organization between teachers and students. CMCD^{SM} was developed at the University of Houston-Central campus. Implementation entails a needs assessment and the development of a tailored

5 Borman, Geoffrey D., Hewes, Gina M., Overman, Laura T., & Brown, Shelly (2003) Comprehensive school reform and student achievement: A meta-analysis. Review of Educational Research, 73 (2), 125-230.]

plan, including workshops and instructional materials to meet the needs of each site. As a result of CMCD℠'s demonstrated effectiveness, its adoption by schools in the United States, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom has increased from three schools serving 1,500 students in 1995 to over 150 schools serving over 80,000 students in 2003.

Classroom strategies, integrated throughout the school day, are based upon the following themes:

- *Prevention:* Classroom discipline problems are prevented before they begin. Teachers use strategies such as recognizing students for doing the right thing, providing pencils for students who come to class without them, and using the conflict resolution process to solve student-to-student issues. Teachers also motivate good behavior through the use of coupons and positive praise.
- *Organization:* The learning environment is organized to prevent off-task behavior and to encourage students' management of their own behavior. This includes organizing space, time, materials and supplies, and routines, and the posting of daily learning expectations. Students can often apply and interview for classroom management positions. Routines are established for absent students to self-manage completion of missed assignments and for student managers to assist substitute teachers.
- *Caring:* The classroom climate reflects a caring learning environment. Taking time to connect with students is the first step in classroom management. Strategies include having students select examples of their best work for display throughout the room and hallways and providing a communication method, such as a mail box, for students to share celebratory events as well as problems. Teachers use active questioning strategies to ensure that all students are engaged and have an equal opportunity to respond. Teachers routinely use reflection time and exit tickets to allow students to internalize learning, connect to prior learning, and report what they have learned.
- *Cooperation:* School staff, teachers, and students work together to achieve an orderly environment in which to work and actively learn. School staff, teachers, and students use nonverbal signals to gain attention and "zero noise" from their audience. Teachers use cooperative learning strategies to foster team participation and responsibility for each student's success.
- *Classroom and community communication:* A school-wide system for positive communication with parents forms a mutually responsible relationship between home and school. An active constituency of parents and community members is involved in school governance. A communication system documents phone calls, parent conferences, and the systematic distribution of notes that provide positive messages for parents.

CMCD℠ responds to the changing needs of students by establishing consistency within the classroom and throughout the school, while providing flexibility and responsiveness to the unique styles of each teacher. Progress builds over time to provide a stable and orderly learning environment in which students become self-disciplined by experiencing greater responsibility. Greater responsibility is provided through a series of activities that allows students to become partners in the classroom. Students gain self-discipline by resolving conflicts, solving problems, participating in decisions and by having responsibility for managing the classroom. These experiences, guided by the teacher, enable students to test their own sense of values and build important bridges to their future roles in the larger world.

The goal of CMCD℠ is the achievement of instructional effectiveness. Recent empirical studies have shown that the teaching skills and classroom management skills of teachers are the strongest factors that determine the effectiveness of student learning.[6] Consequently, the enhancement of the skills of teachers is the most cost-effective approach for increasing students' interest and academic performance.

6 Joyce and Showers, 1988; Pittman, 1985; Frieberg, Buckley, and Townsend, 1983; Freiberg, 1994; Freiberg and others, 1995; Frieberg, 1996 and 1997; Olatokunbo and Slavin, 1997

When classrooms experience more student misbehavior, less time is spent on task, and students realize less achievement. Consequently, it is not surprising that many educators regard improving student discipline as one of the most important factors in improving schools. Statistics indicate that through the implementation of CMCD℠, schools save between 15 and 18 days per year for instruction.

4. Social Services/Parent Involvement

Providing campus-based social services and parent involvement staff is central to the Project GRAD mission. This component focuses on drop-out prevention and social services that provide guidance, counseling, community outreach, and family case management services to at-risk students. Through these services students and their parents become aware of private and public community resources and how to access these resources to meet their social, economic, health, and other needs. The Project GRAD Social Service/Parent Involvement component provides support services for students that enable them to appreciate learning, stay in school, and improve their academic performance.

This component ensures that students have easy access to its services by placing full-time social service providers and project managers in schools to work with teachers, counselors and parents. In each GRAD site, this component is customized to meet the specific needs within the feeder system. At both the elementary and secondary levels, social services/parent involvement staff members work to identify the needs of students and their parents in order to provide appropriate instructional support activities for them. Parental involvement and support activities are organized in most schools to enhance communication between teachers and parents.

Also, parents are empowered to become advocates both of their own children and the entire school community. The parent involvement initiative focuses on supporting parents in feeling more responsibility for and in taking a more active role in the life of their school. Parents are supported in enhancing their relationships with administrators and teachers to build an active constituency for their school.

Social services/parent involvement staff members annually facilitate the *Walk for Success,* in which volunteers typically visit the homes of all first, second, sixth, and ninth graders about to enter a Project GRAD school. The volunteers inform parents about the program and, at the ninth grade level, ask them to sign a contract committing their children to the scholarship program. Then, based upon surveys during the *Walk for Success,* Parent Universities are set up throughout the feeder patterns to offer parents courses which they have requested. An example of the success of the program is the fact that in 1999 Project GRAD Houston offered scholarships to three parents who received their GED through the Parent University Program.

The social services/parent involvement staff members work strategically with other components to ensure student success. For literacy, they staff, chair and/or participate in the Family Support Team, which provides support for struggling readers; recruit tutors and listeners; and invite parents to the training sessions. For mathematics, they recruit tutors, use the strategies in after-school programs, and invite parents to Family Math Nights. For classroom management, they adapt and use the strategies in their

office and invite parents to the Parent University workshops on the component. For the scholarship component, they inform parents about the Project GRAD scholarships, encourage students to attend college, conduct college awareness activities for students and parents, and coordinate the *Walk for Success.*

Social services/parent involvement staff in both the elementary and secondary schools coordinate the College Awareness Day's activities. As a complement to the scholarship component, the college awareness activities and discussion begin in Pre-K and Kindergarten classes and continue through high school. Each year on College Awareness Day teachers decorate rooms and doors with material from their college, hold assemblies with guest speakers, and promote the idea that every child can go to college.

This component is delivered through a set of on-site staff members. The elementary model for this component features a Social Services/Parent Involvement Project Manager who may be a licensed social worker or someone with related experience of working in schools and/or with students. When the enrollment of the school exceeds 750, an additional staff person is recommended. Upon referral, with parental permission, individual students receive a combination of services such as individual counseling, parental support/intervention, tutoring, and access to enrichment activities. At the elementary level, the staff member plays a critical role in facilitating the Literacy Family Support Team. As a part of this team, the staff person assists with attendance issues, provides referrals to community agencies for families, and helps to involve them. At the larger secondary schools, the team may consist of a Project Manager and one to three social services/parent involvement providers. At the secondary level, staff members provide all the services mentioned above except those related to the Literacy Family Support Team and provide support for the scholarship component.

Staff members also develop and implement activities that allow students to see themselves as college students and promote awareness of the scholarship opportunity. The high school staff members coordinate closely with the Project GRAD Scholarship Coordinator in order to serve the maximum number of students. Activities may include parent and student college visits, guest speakers, SAT/PSAT preparation, assistance with loan and scholarship applications, and tutoring and mentoring. At all levels, students are assisted by staff to solve personal and family problems that can potentially interfere with their doing well in school. The role of the social services/parent involvement component to the overall effectiveness of GRAD is vital considering the range of problems young people and their families face in inner-city environments. Research substantiates the correlation between educational success and parental involvement.[7] As noted by a perceptive observer: "Trying to educate the young without the help and support from the home is akin to trying to rake leaves in a high wind."[8]

Many of the GRAD sites utilize the social services and parental involvement support of Communities in Schools (CIS), a leading community-based organization that provides a critical linkage between the classroom and the students' non-academic needs. In cities where no CIS agency exists, Project GRAD has developed a similar service entity, Campus Family Support.

7 Walberg, 1994; Etzioni, 1984; Gough, 1991; Radin, 1979; Unger, 1985
8 Gough., 1991

5. The High School Program

Unlike the GRAD elementary and middle schools, at GRAD high schools, at the apex of the feeder system, there are no GRAD-recommended curricular programs, apart from those mandated by the states as their college preparatory program. This reflects the fact that high schools offer a wide array of academic subjects; and thus it is not possible for GRAD to bring a single curricular approach to the high school. Instead, GRAD's work with its high schools might be thought of as "demand driven": students stream to the high schools better prepared as the result of their experiences in the GRAD elementary and middle schools. Thus there is a demand-side motivation for the high schools to enrich and strengthen their academic offering. The local GRAD organizations work with the high schools to achieve this, supplying technical assistance and mobilizing the resources needed for the professional development of teachers and to improve and diversify academic curricular offerings. GRAD high schools are also assisted to restructure themselves internally, employing effective approaches such as High Schools that Work, Career Academies and other small learning community approaches. In all GRAD high schools, a classroom management system and a Social Services/Parent Involvement Component are provided.

Above all else, Project GRAD brings to its high schools a series of activities and services that focus on preparing students for high school graduation and success in college. At the center of the GRAD high school effort is the guarantee of a college scholarship for all students who qualify to increase college access for all students. Through the services of the social services/parent involvement staff and the campus-based Scholarship Coordinator, students are supported in meeting the scholarship qualifications and applying for and entering college. The Project GRAD High School Program has the following major elements:

- Core Components:
  - The Scholarship Component
  - The Social Services/Parent Involvement Component
  - The Classroom Management Component.
- Academic Initiatives, including:
  - Providing summer interventions to enhance the upcoming ninth grade year
  - Scheduling double period in mathematics and literacy to provide more time on task for students with significant deficit;
  - Personalizing education through ninth grade 100-student houses and introduction of adult mentors/advocates for all students
  - Increasing rigor through the introduction of increased numbers of Pre-AP and AP courses.

Through these programs, Project GRAD seeks to engender high academic aspirations among teachers, students, and families; increase academic rigor; personalize the educational experience; and collaborate with business, the larger community, and especially with parents in order to ensure student success and increased college access.

GRAD High School Core Components

The foundation of the GRAD High School Program is a set of core elements that are routinely installed at all Project GRAD high schools. These elements include the Scholarship component, which supports a common vision of educational excellence and high academic expectations; the Social Services/Parent Involvement component, which provides personalization of the educational experience by ensuring a safety net for students and families in crisis; and the Classroom Management System, which builds a climate of respect and responsibility.

The Scholarship Component

When the partnership between GRAD and a high school at the apex of a K–12 feeder system is established, the multidimensional scholarship component, which is focused on preparation for college to increase college access for all students, becomes available to all entering ninth graders. A campus-based Scholarship Coordinator, together with social services/parent involvement staff, work to help students graduate and gain access to college through a number of key activities:

- *Walk for Success and Learning Contract:* Early in the ninth grade year, the Scholarship Coordinator, together with social services/parent involvement and other school staff and community volunteers, visit the homes of all students to inform them about Project GRAD's goals and college scholarships and to enlist their support in fulfilling the criteria required for the scholarships. They are also asked to sign a learning contract that stipulates what is expected of students and the parents, as well as what the high school and GRAD will provide during the high school years and beyond.
- *Summer/Intersession Institutes and College Visits:* Beginning during the summer after GRAD is launched, students between grades nine and ten are expected to attend a four-week Summer Institute. These are planned jointly by high school and college partners, situated on a college campus, and taught at least in part by college faculty. These Institutes serve a dual function: they provide remediation and/or academic enrichment, depending on the student's needs, so that he or she is better prepared to succeed academically during the coming school year. They also encourage students to think that college is a realistic possibility. Following the initial Institute, students must complete at least one more Institute during the summer between grades 10 and 11 and/or between grades 11 and 12.
- *College Scholarships:* Scholarships are awarded to graduating seniors who successfully:
  - Graduate from the GRAD feeder system high school
  - Graduate with at least a 2.5 GPA
  - Attend at least two summer/intersession institutes
  - Successfully complete the courses designated as college preparatory by their state, district, and school
  - Graduate in four or fewer years.

  While the GRAD scholarship, averaging $1,000 to $1,500 per year provides motivation as well as money, the Scholarship Coordinators work to help students attract additional scholarships and financial aid, to ensure that college is financially possible. The Scholarship Coordinator also works with each student to help him or her maintain the GPA required to trigger the GRAD scholarship and to succeed in the college preparatory curriculum.

- *College Support:* Once students have matriculated in college, they work with College Managers. The College Manager works with them and their colleges to help assure a successful first year experience, keeps up with the students as the scholarship is renewed annually, and invites students back to their high schools to provide mentoring experiences for future GRAD graduates during College Day activities.

Over a period of two to three years, the following additional core high school components are rolled out:

The Social Services/Parent Involvement Component

Providing campus-based social services and parent involvement staff is central to Project GRAD's success. Sites having Communities in Schools (CIS) in their area utilize their staff for this service, while those sites that do not have access to CIS utilize Campus Family Support (CFS), a customized version of the program utilizing local staff. Three to five trained social services/parent involvement staff assigned to each high school involve parents and community members in the education of students and broker community services needed by families in crisis. They work with parents to inform them about GRAD Scholarships and help them support their students' emerging college plans, taking them on college tours and providing information about college programs and financing, coordinating closely with the Scholarship Coordinator. Also, parents are empowered to become advocates both of their own children and of the entire school community.

The Classroom Management Component

Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline℠ (CMCD℠) is a classroom management system that invites students to become actively engaged in taking responsibility for much of the day–to–day management of the classroom. CMCD℠ runs through all grades, K through 12, in GRAD feeder systems; and at the high school level, it helps students acquire the skills needed to function in a self-disciplined manner. This frees teachers from most traditional classroom management and discipline responsibilities and fosters a classroom climate more conducive to high-level learning.

Academic Initiatives

GRAD's emphasis on academic rigor in the high school is made possible through the preparation provided in the feeder pattern programs. Students come through the feeder system and enter high school better prepared for serious academic work; and there is, thus, a demand-side motivation for high schools to enrich and strengthen their academic offerings. Also, implementing the core components described above helps to reshape the culture of the high schools. Students are motivated to aspire to college, they feel connected to the school through the social services/parent involvement provider's work, and they practice self-discipline. Teachers report that they gain the equivalent of as many as 15 teaching days per year as a result of CMCD℠.

These changes in school climate enable high school faculty to work to enhance academic rigor. The local GRAD organizations work with the high schools to achieve this, supplying technical assistance and mobilizing the resources needed for the professional development of teachers and to improve and diversify academic curricular offerings. Examples of current GRAD initiatives to improve academic rigor include support of summer interventions that, in effect, elongate the ninth grade year to provide students with more time on task in the core subjects of mathematics and literacy and to ensure a smooth transi-

tion to high school. The focus on ninth grade continues by supporting the division of ninth grade classes into 100-student "houses," the scheduling of double periods for mathematics and literacy for students with significant deficits, and the introduction of endowed "chairs" in mathematics and English language arts, to oversee customized curricula and to train and coach teachers.

GRAD also supports personalization of education through the introduction of adult mentors/advocates for all students in school and tutoring throughout the grades on an as-needed basis. Project GRAD facilitates the introduction and expanded offerings of Pre-Advanced Placement and Advanced Placement courses and the taking of the ACT or SAT by all eligible students. Teachers are provided an array of training opportunities, including those which prepare them to teach Pre-AP and AP courses as well as to prepare students to excel on the ACT and SAT tests. Students are also provided ACT/SAT training, and test registration fees may be subsidized.

How Formative Data Guide Implementation

How Formative Data Guide Implementation

The strategic use of data is essential to Project GRAD's effectiveness. Local GRAD sites and Project GRAD USA use summative measures such as achievement test scores, high school graduation rates, and college enrollment and graduation rates as the ultimate indicators of outcomes and impact. However, at the local level, more formative data help guide program implementation and, most importantly, assist in keeping track of individual students' progress throughout the school year.

Periodic walk-throughs provide sites with crucial feedback about the level and quality of implementation as they introduce new mathematics, literacy, and discipline management components. Also, school climate data, regularly collected, provide an on-going indicator of the success of the discipline management system. And judicious use of formative academic achievement data is a key to mobilizing resources on a regular basis to assist individual students and teachers-waiting until the end of school terms is often too late to provide assistance to individuals who may not be doing well.

The process to gather and use timely achievement data begins with careful alignment of the mathematics and literacy program curricula with state objectives, fine-tuning the scope and sequence to meet local needs, and providing sample teaching plans and test questions replicating the state format for testing. This ongoing process is accomplished through the joint efforts of component providers, the local GRAD site, and Project GRAD USA. In the summer prior to the school year, school principals are guided to review the data from the last year's achievement tests and, based upon their findings, set goals for component implementation and aligned instruction and determine overall staff development needs. This is followed by workshops for teachers and administrators on curriculum alignment and the plan for using formative assessment to guide instruction throughout the year.

Additionally, the local GRAD site must acquire grade-level appropriate benchmark tests that match the aligned scope, sequence, and state test format. These benchmark tests are given at least twice during the school year to chart student progress in content mastery. Results from these tests are also used to acquire baseline data for the current year's objectives. State-prepared tests, commercially available products, and materials produced by the district with assistance from the local GRAD organization may all be used as benchmark tests.

Once these elements are in place, an ongoing campus-level process begins with the opening of the school year. Using previous year test results and/or locally administered baseline pretest results, principals and teachers are guided by the local GRAD entity, with the support of GRAD USA, in interpreting school-level data in order to refine teaching plans to meet student needs. This refinement of teaching plans and emphases, together with targeted staff development, is repeated throughout the year as individual schools analyze benchmark test data. Teachers are provided support in developing re-teaching strategies and tutorial plans as needed.

Also at the building level, with the support of the district and local GRAD organization, administrators and teachers monitor ongoing student achievement at shorter intervals through eight-week assessments in reading and quick checks in mathematics. Ongoing regrouping for instruction and development of re-teaching and tutorial plans follow from the analysis of such data. At the most basic level,

each day the school staff monitors how classroom instruction is proceeding in order to assure consistency and alignment with state objectives and component expectations. Daily observations, together with implementation walk-through reports supplied by the component providers, enable school administrators to ensure effective program implementation.

This systematic approach to the use of data enables schools to guide instruction on a formative basis at the day–to–day, week–to–week, and month–to–month levels. In this manner, the summative goals of increased achievement on annual norm-referenced achievement tests, increased high school graduation rates, and successful college attendance numbers can be realized.

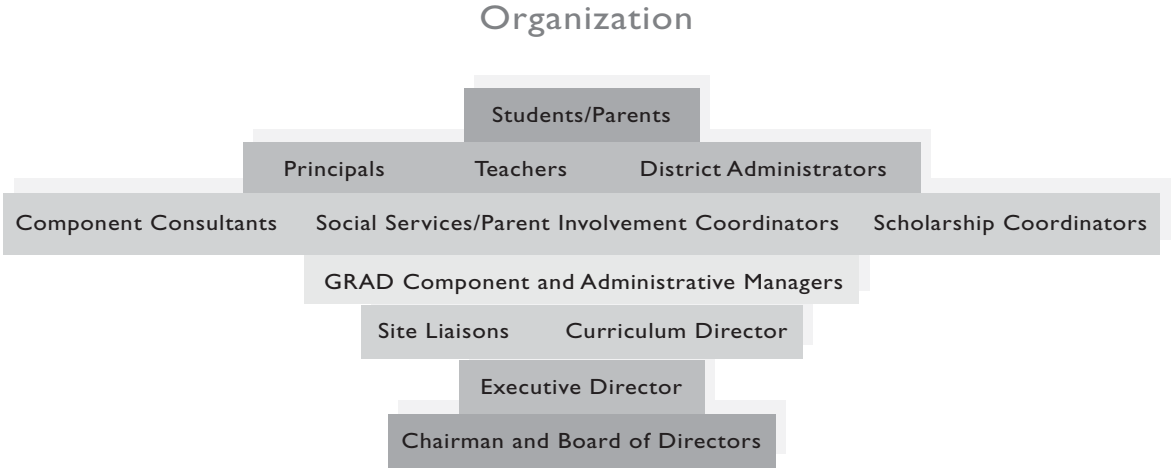
Structure of the Local GRAD Organization

Structure of the Local GRAD Organization

Organizational Structure

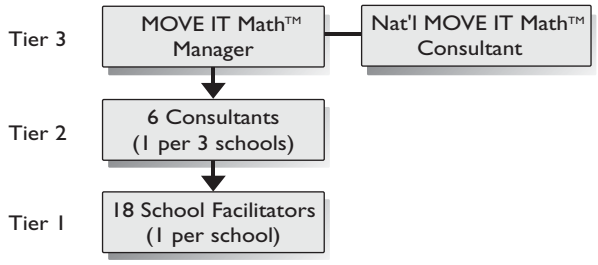
The organizational chart below depicts a typical structure for a local Project GRAD organization implementing the program in two feeder patterns. While organizational structure differs somewhat from site to site, the underlying model remains constant so these local structures do not vary significantly.

Each Project GRAD site is set up as an independent, nonprofit legal entity. Accordingly, an independent Board of Directors governs each GRAD organization. Creating these independent entities allows key constituencies to be mobilized at the local level, a critical factor in GRAD's potential success. The well-articulated definition of the Project GRAD model and the coordinating role played by Project GRAD USA ensures this need for local autonomy is balanced by mechanisms to enable successful, consistent implementation across all sites.



Component Support Model

Embedded in the Project GRAD organizational structure is a three-tiered approach to ensuring successful program implementation. The approach to supporting MOVE IT Math™ is shown below for illustrative purposes. The program support structure varies slightly by component and feeder, where specific conditions require more or less support.



In Tier 1, a school-based Facilitator is recruited from among the teachers at each school. The Facilitator, who remains a full-time classroom teacher but receives an extra-duty stipend, provides "front line" implementation assistance for teachers at the school and helps coordinate the logistics associated with professional development and material ordering. This model is modified for SFA where the school-based SFA facilitator works in this position full-time, rather than pairing role with teaching.

In Tier 2, consultants provide in-depth and ongoing professional development support for the teachers in MOVE IT Math™. This level of support is critical to ensuring that initial training is supplemented by high-quality, ongoing coaching and provides continuity for schools where high teacher turnover rates are the norm. These consultants are almost exclusively former classroom teachers who have demonstrated exceptional ability in mathematics instruction and peer professional development. In general, one consultant will be assigned three schools, so he or she can spend a minimum of one day per week on site at each school.

Tier 3 support is provided by the MOVE IT Math™ manager. The manager has overall responsibility for the quality of the mathematics implementation. The manager is supported by a National MOVE IT Math™ consultant assigned to his or her site. This relationship provides a conduit for disseminating best practices across sites and obtaining input for the continuous development of the program itself.

How GRAD is Being Evaluated

How GRAD is Being Evaluated

It is through measurable achievement outcomes such as test scores, grades, graduation rates, college attendance and completion that students and their schools are held accountable. As noted earlier, the American Institute for Research (AIR) found, "Only a few approaches had documented their positive effects on student achievement. Several approaches appeared to hold promise, but lacked evidence to verify this conclusion." Their report stated further, "that the lack of evidence was understandable: the approach was just too new to have collected the necessary data or in other cases, the approach's developers and the school systems that use it never got around to conducting a systematic evaluation."[9] The report called on the federal government to invest more money in programmatic research and the development of data.

The United States Department of Education has subsequently produced a set of criteria that rate projects. These include:

- Theory/research
- Evaluation-based evidence of effectiveness
- Implementation
- Replicability.

While Project GRAD was not evaluated as part of this AIR report, the program appears to comply with all of these criteria. Recognizing that evaluation was crucial to the development and refinement of the Project GRAD model and that independently reported results were essential to assessing GRAD's potential impact, Project GRAD instituted what is, to date, one of the most extensive evaluation processes of any school reform program. And GRAD began this evaluation very soon after it was launched as a fully developed model.

Funded by a grant from the University of Houston, evaluation began in Houston in the 1994–1995 school year. In that year, the first feeder system of nine schools was studied. As GRAD expanded in Houston to include five feeder systems the evaluation was expanded to include them all. The latest report concludes, "The Project GRAD model's successes have validated the fact that the intricate and problematic challenges confronting the nation's inner-city schools can be overcome with appropriate resources, strategies, perseverance, and school-community collaboration."[10]

By the year 2000, Project GRAD had expanded from Houston to Atlanta, Columbus, Los Angeles and Newark. The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), a leading research firm with a 25–year history of evaluating promising social policy interventions, began an independent five-year evaluation of each of these five expansion sites.[11]

The national evaluation addressed the following central question for the school districts, school-community stakeholders, and funders involved in the initiative: Does implementation of Project GRAD lead to better student outcomes than would have occurred in the absence of the initiative in each of the expansion sites? Specifically, MDRC set out to answer three key questions:

- How was Project GRAD implemented in the expansion sites and what are the lessons emerging from this experience?

9 AIR Report detail needed
10 Houston.
11 Since 2000, Project GRAD has grown to include additional sites. These sites will not be a part of the MDRC evaluation.

- What were the outcomes for schools and students after Project GRAD was put in place?
- How did this differ from what would have happened had Project GRAD not been implemented?

The evaluation is both formative and summative in nature. It is formative in that findings from the study are intended to provide information that may enhance the execution of the Project GRAD model in the current expansion sites through timely and on-going feedback on the implementation process. The evaluation is summative in that the effects of the model over time will be measured to distinguish causal impacts of the Project GRAD model on student and school outcomes.

MDRC is providing two kinds of findings. The evaluation team works to provide "snapshot" formative feedback on the process of implementation focused on the following:

- The extent to which Project GRAD components are in place within and across participating feeders
- Factors that arise that are affecting implementation either positively or negatively
- An understanding of how the operational context of the Project GRAD schools is affecting implementation.

In addition, MDRC is working to provide answers to the crucial summative evaluation question:

What is the impact of Project GRAD on key student outcomes such as disciplinary incidents (especially suspensions), student engagement (attendance), academic achievement (especially test scores), high school graduation and college enrollment?

Evaluation activities include the following:

- Formative feedback and implementation advice provided by MDRC, facilitating identification of possible solutions to implementation challenges
- Analysis on changes over time in key measures of student experience and performance ("outcome" analysis) and on the role of Project GRAD in producing this change ("program impact" analysis)
- Analysis done at the site level with data pooled across sites to allow investigation of results for subgroups in the student population
- A common core of questions for an annual survey of teachers
- A focus on cross-site patterns in findings and lessons for program design and operation
- Research on changes in student experience and performance and an examination of program implementation.

In addition, sites are provided with the following:

- Invitations to participate in periodic meetings and/or conference calls with all sites to discuss key questions, research approaches, and emerging findings
- A common vision of the goals of the evaluation and support for consensus building around its importance
- Technical assistance on evaluation and formative feedback to program operators
- A common list of core evaluation topics such as program implementation, changes in school climate and the education experience, student achievement, graduation, and college-going information across sites
- Technical assistance in identifying and accessing local and regional resources needed to fund the evaluation
- Access to online information on expansion districts and the national evaluation.

Implementation Analysis

In studying the implementation of Project GRAD, the standard approach is to focus data collection efforts in the Project GRAD schools; but MDRC is also doing some limited data collection (through interviews with key staff and document review) on the larger district context to understand how Project GRAD differs from past initiatives in these schools and from what is occurring in other schools in the district. The goals of the implementation study are to:

- Describe how Project GRAD develops and evolves over time in the various new locations
- Identify the extent to which Project GRAD components are implemented within and across participating schools and feeder patterns
- Explore how site variations (specifically those variations which ideally could be controlled by sites selecting GRAD) affect implementation and outcomes
- Explain how contextual and organizational factors are influencing implementation.

MDRC's goal is to document the Project GRAD implementation experience (sometimes called "documentation research") as framed by the opportunities to learn specific things from each site. Documentation research involves a continuous process of data collection and analysis. MDRC is applying the data from its documentation research efforts. MDRC uses this research to develop a descriptive account of program implementation focused on capturing participant perceptions and contextual issues over stages of Project GRAD implementation in various districts from the early years of implementation through operational maturity.

Through the formative feedback process, MDRC encourages Project GRAD planners and implementers (including staff at the school and district levels) to consider findings from this examination in their own planning and decision-making processes. A key feature of this evaluation is to assist Project GRAD planners in thinking about strategies and/or alternative approaches that may be used to strengthen the initiative as it proceeds.

Data collection on Project GRAD occurs through ongoing field research at the project schools and at other sites where Project GRAD-related activities are conducted. The field research is organized and planned with the full input of Project GRAD staff and the district. Field-based data collection for the implementation research aspect of the evaluation includes (but is not limited to) the following types of activities:

- Interviews and/or focus groups conducted with district administrators, teachers, staff developers, and other school staff. The purpose of the interviews is to collect information on the school community members' experiences with Project GRAD. All individual information obtained through interview or focus group discussions remains confidential.
- Selected Observations of Project GRAD component activities within schools and observations of other Project GRAD-related activities are conducted. In-school observations (including classroom observation) are conducted for the purpose of documenting and understanding the extent to which Project GRAD activities are being implemented. Selected observations of other Project GRAD activities such as planning meetings, staff retreats, professional development opportunities, and parental involvement events occur as well.

- Document review of district– and school-level improvement plans. Committee meeting minutes, school newsletters, and other descriptive documents are collected as warranted and the Project GRAD staff is relied upon heavily to share information and direct the evaluation team to important sources. Data is examined on district-level activities, the efforts of component providers, and the experiences of the nonprofit organizations managing Project GRAD implementation. These documents help to provide MDRC with a better understanding of overall priorities and activities within the school districts across all site contexts and, specifically, within Project GRAD schools across sites.
- Teacher surveys are fielded each year and focused on Project GRAD schools and their staff, but not in the comparison schools.

Student Outcomes and Impact Design

Estimating the impact of Project GRAD in selected sites is the centerpiece of the evaluation design. Impact means the change in student outcomes caused by the model, which represents the difference between outcomes experienced in its presence and those that would have been experienced in its absence. The beginning point for this analysis is to document trends in key student outcomes within the Project GRAD schools. MDRC then uses more complex analytical approaches to understand the contribution of the Project GRAD effort in producing observed changes in key outcomes.

As an overview of the approach, MDRC first works to document trends in key school and student outcomes to estimate the trend prior to the implementation of Project GRAD. MDRC then sees if, coincident with the implementation of Project GRAD, these trends improve. Finally, where similar data is available, MDRC documents trends in comparison schools to see if the improvements are unique to the Project GRAD schools and thus are likely linked to (caused by) its implementation. Where there are many initiatives besides Project GRAD underway in a district, a comparison of Project GRAD schools with other schools represents a comparison of outcomes produced by Project GRAD relative to other on-going improvement efforts. The use of comparison schools for key student outcomes allows the evaluation team to be more confident that they have isolated the impact of Project GRAD.

Impacts on Other Student Outcomes

The Project GRAD theory of change suggests that in addition to increasing student achievement, the initiative also improves other key student outcomes, such as class attendance, credits earned, continuation in school and promotion to a higher grade. For as many of these outcomes as possible MDRC uses interrupted time-series analysis based on data from school administrative records to measure the impact of Project GRAD.

The basic approach for each outcome is to obtain data for at least three years prior to the launch of Project GRAD (the baseline period) and four years thereafter (the follow-up period). The impact of Project GRAD then is measured as the deviation from the baseline trend during each follow-up year. A consistent pattern of improvement across Project GRAD schools would suggest that the initiative produced these improvements. If comparison school data has been obtained, MDRC further strengthens this causal inference through an interrupted time-series analysis for comparison schools.

Evidence Thus Far of Project GRAD's Effectiveness

Evidence Thus Far of Project GRAD's Effectiveness

The long–term goal of Project GRAD is to increase dramatically the number of low-income students who graduate from high school, enter college, and in turn graduate. To be specific, GRAD seeks to see the percentage of students who graduate from high school increase from the current average of about 60 percent to 80 percent; the percentage entering college to rise from the current average of 20 percent of the high school graduating class to 50 percent; and the percentage of these students who enter college and graduate increase from the current 20 percent to 50 percent.

Evidence from the trajectories of progress in the first three feeder patterns of schools in Houston indicate this is likely to take up to 10 years to accomplish fully. However, significant gains are possible in the shorter run, again based on experience in Houston in multiple feeders and early evidence from other cities. Thus, the intermediary goals are to see high school graduation rates of 75 percent after five years, college entrance rates to rise to 40 percent of graduates, and college completion rates to trend toward 35 percent during the same five–year period.

The working assumption is that there is likely to be accelerated progress toward GRAD's ambitious long–term goals as more students in the education pipeline receive more GRAD "treatment" and flow into the upper grades. As an indication of this pipeline phenomenon, GRAD projects significant increases in student achievement test scores in the lower grades as GRAD is rolled in component by component. But these increases in the number of students reading at grade level, for example, good though they are, are not seen as ends in themselves but rather as indicators that students are on a path that eventually leads to college with college enrollment and graduation still the goal. It should also be said that GRAD does not see its focus on the acquisition of basic academic skills to be the end of the story. On the contrary, GRAD sees this to be the beginning—it seeks to build a core of competencies on which to build the other elements of a fine education that includes science and the arts among other disciplines. GRAD, for example, says a child must first learn to read in order to be able to read to learn.

The following section will, first, present data from GRAD's experience in Houston where it began and then offer early indications of how GRAD has taken hold at the next group of GRAD sites, particularly in Newark, which was the first city after Houston to attempt to implement the GRAD model.

Project GRAD–Houston

High School Graduation and College-Going Rates

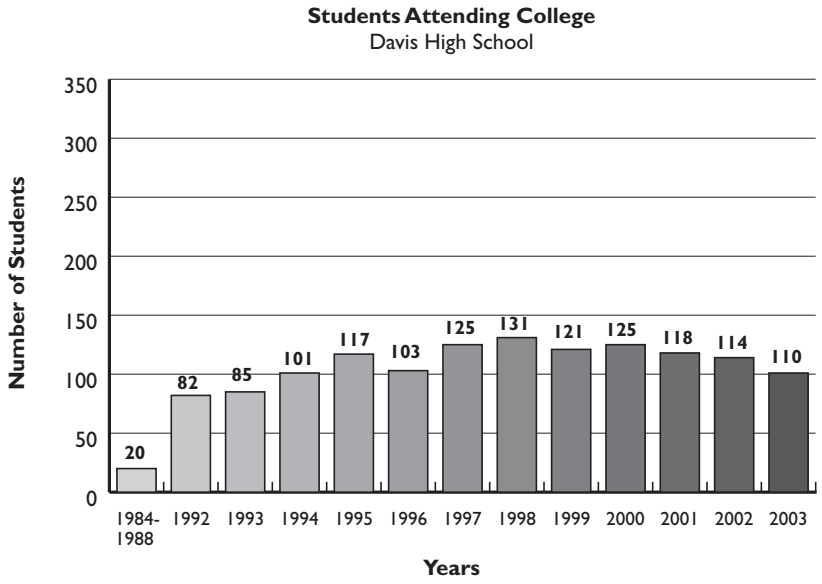
Jefferson Davis Feeder

When Project GRAD first started working with the Davis Feeder Pattern in 1989, Davis High School was the lowest-performing school in the Houston Independent School District. Student academic achievement levels in all nine of the feeder pattern's schools were very low, graduation rates were far below the state average, and the number of students entering college was negligible. Project GRAD's job was to change the culture of the schools so that parents, students, teachers, and administrators all expected and promoted high levels of student academic achievement with the shared expectation that all students could and would graduate and attend college. The following data provide a snapshot of the Davis Feeder Pattern before and after the implementation of the Project GRAD program:

The number of students graduating from Davis High School has increased from an average of 174 in the five years before the program started (1984–1988), to an average of 300 over the last five years (1999–2003).

Since before implementation of Project GRAD (1984–88) to 2003, the Houston Independent School District (HISD) has seen a one percent drop in the number of students graduating from high school. During the same period, Davis High School has seen a 77 percent increase in the number of students graduating from high school.

Prior to GRAD's implementation, fewer than 20 Davis High School graduates enrolled in college per year. Since the first class of graduating scholars in 1992, the number of students attending college annually has risen to an average of 111 per year. By the end of the 12th year of awarding GRAD scholarships in Davis High School, 1,332 Davis graduates had entered college.

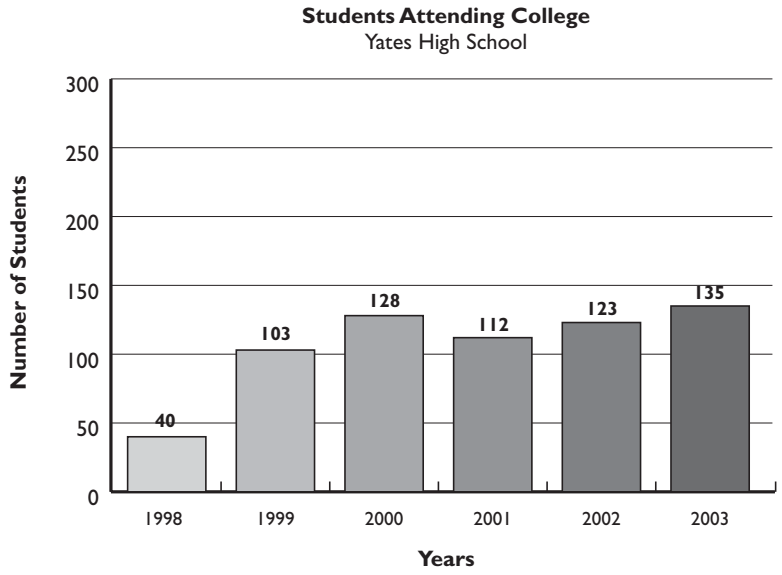


Project GRAD scholars from Davis are now attending universities such as Princeton, Cornell, University of Virginia, Drexel, Rice, Texas A&M, the University of Houston, and the University of Texas.

In the year before Project GRAD started its work in the Davis Feeder Pattern, 51 Davis High School students took the SAT, with only four scoring 900 or above. In 2003, 127 seniors took the SAT, with 41 scoring 900 or above. As reported by the HISD, by 2001, Davis went from last to first among Houston's 27 high schools in the number of students offered scholarships by colleges and universities. Yates High School, another GRAD site, was third. Additionally, a recent study by the Pew Hispanic Center has shown that Hispanic students who enter college from Davis High School stay enrolled in college and obtain a college degree at a rate of 51 percent, much higher than the 27 percent national average for low-income students.

Jack Yates Feeder

The success of the Project GRAD program in the Davis Feeder led other HISD feeders to partner with Project GRAD with the hope of changing the culture of low expectations of student academic achievement to one of high expectations, graduation, and college attendance. The Yates Feeder Pattern began implementing Project GRAD in the 1995–1996 school year. The following data provide a snapshot of the progress to date:



In 1998, the year before the first class of graduating scholars, 40 Yates High School graduates enrolled in college. Since the first class of scholarship recipients in 1999, the number of students attending college has risen to an average of 120 per year.

By the end of the fifth year of awarding GRAD scholarships in Yates High School, 601 graduates had entered college.

Phillis Wheatley Feeder

The Wheatley Feeder was the third HISD feeder pattern to partner with Project GRAD. Program implementation began in 1997. The following data provide a snapshot of progress to date: In 2000, the year before scholarships were first awarded, 15 Wheatley High School graduates enrolled in college. Since the first class of scholarship recipients in 2001, the number of students attending college has risen to an average of 40. By the end of the third year of awarding GRAD scholarships in Wheatley High School, 118 students had entered college.

Reagan and Sam Houston Feeders

The Reagan and Sam Houston Feeder Patterns became the fourth and fifth HISD feeders to implement Project GRAD. In the Reagan Feeder, which joined Project GRAD in 2000, over 618 students have signed the scholarship contract. A total of 1171 students in the Sam Houston Feeder, which joined Project GRAD in March of 2002, have already signed scholarship contracts.

GRAD Scholars

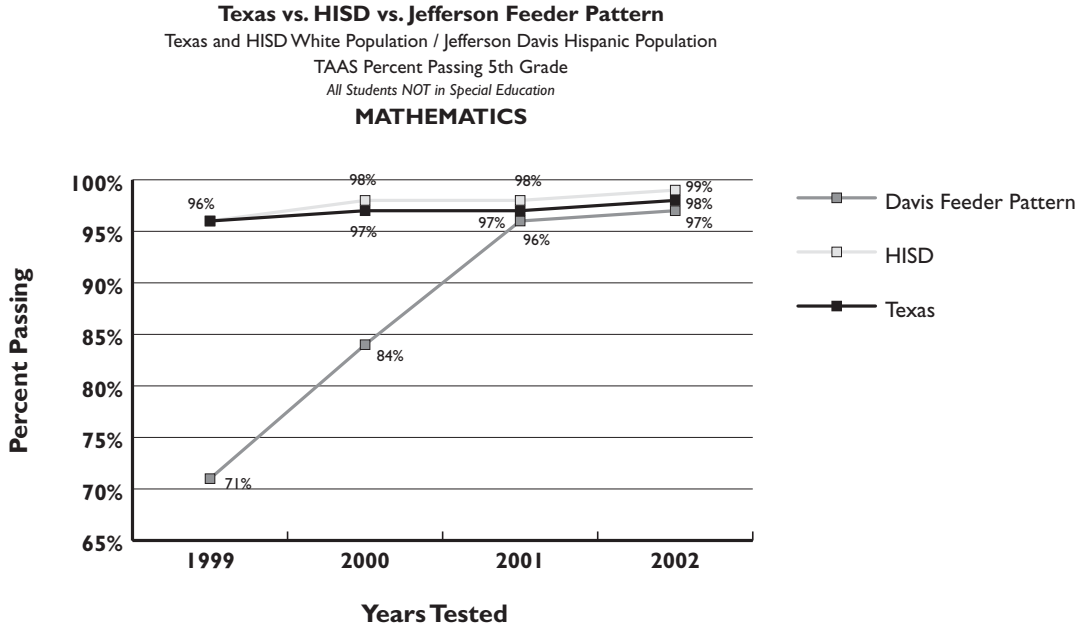
Currently, GRAD scholarships have been awarded to qualified graduates from seven high schools across the country—three in Houston and one each in Atlanta, GA; Columbus, OH; Los Angeles, CA; and Newark, NJ. With more than 600 graduates qualifying for the scholarship in 2003, Project GRAD has had nearly 3,000 qualifying scholars to date. More than 2,300 of those scholars have gone on to attend college.

Elementary and Middle School Indicators of Progress

Though increasing high school graduation and college enrollment and graduation rates are the goals of Project GRAD, during the elementary and middle school years there are indicators of how students are faring as they move through the educational system. These include changes in student behavior, levels of parental involvement, and how students score on statewide and nationally-normed academic achievement tests.

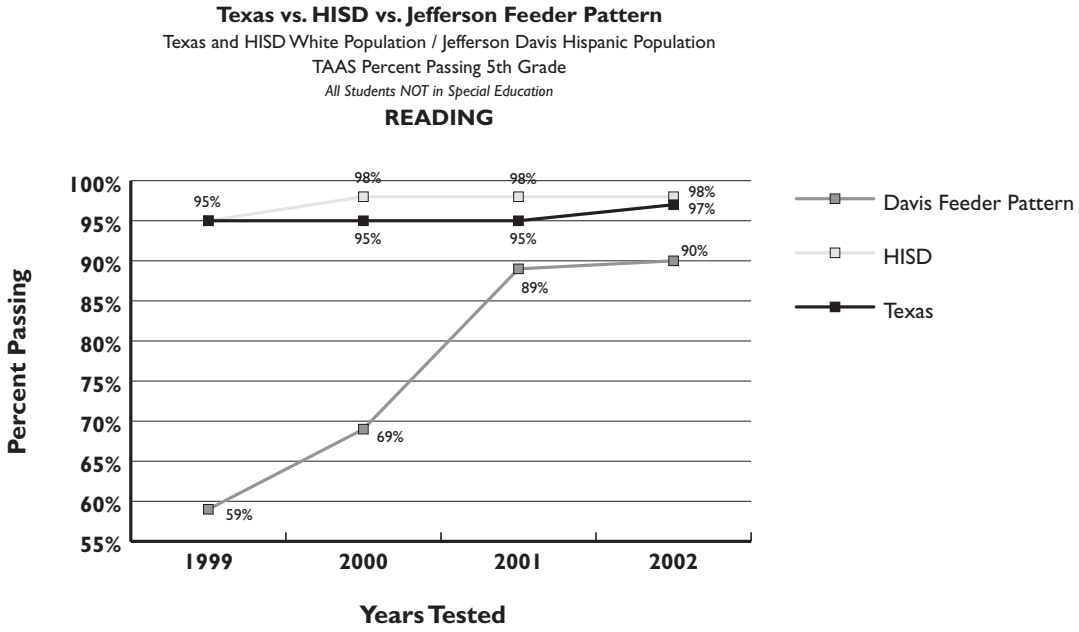
Since the Davis feeder began to implement GRAD, there has been documented growth in student achievement at all participating schools. And this growth has been considerably faster than the improvements in student achievement in both the Houston Independent School District and the State of Texas.

Exemplifying this is the progress made on closing the achievement gap for Hispanic 5th graders as measured by Texas Assessment of Academic Skills Test (TAAS). In 1999, a 25-point difference existed between 5th Grade Hispanic students in the Davis feeder and statewide white student performance on the mathematics portion of TAAS. By 2002, the Davis 5th graders improved their scores by 36 points, successfully closing the gap that had existed with HISD's and the state's 5th grade white populations.



In 1999, a 36-point difference existed between 5th grade Hispanic student performance in the Davis Feeder on the reading portion of the TAAS and that of the 5th grade white population in both HISD and the State of Texas. By 2002, the Davis Feeder Hispanic 5th graders improved their scores by 31 points, making significant progress in closing the gap with HISD's and the state's 5th grade white popu-

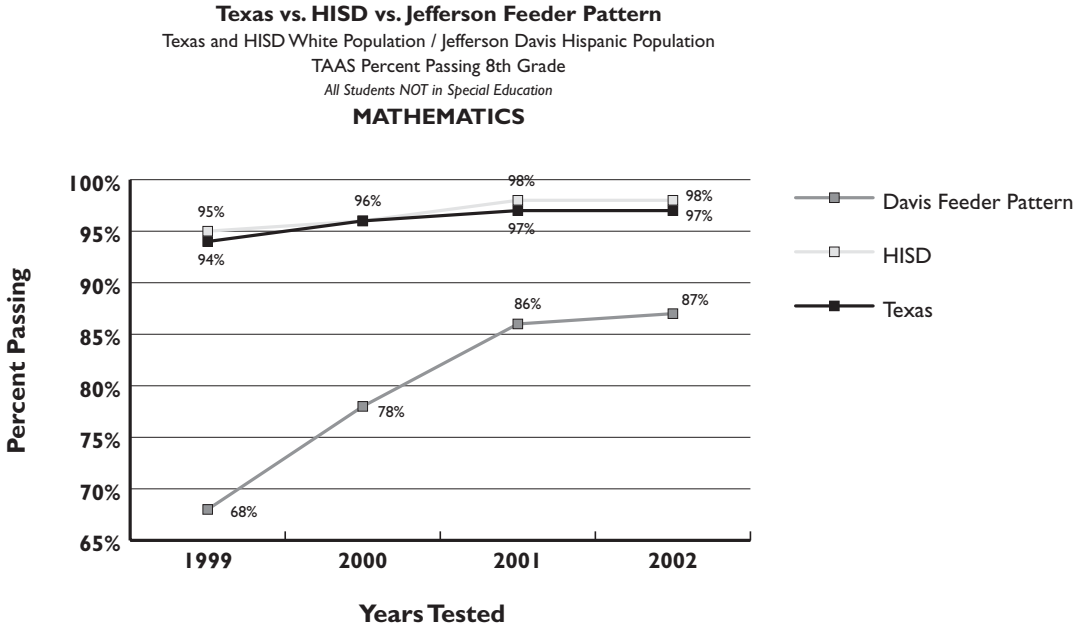
lations.



The success of these students is significant because the Davis 5th graders are the first cohort of students to have experienced the full Project GRAD model since pre-kindergarten. Evidence from the predominantly African-American student body in the Yates Feeder is also encouraging. In 1999, a 16 point difference existed between 5th grade African-American student performance on the mathematics portion of the TAAS in the Yates Feeder and that of the 5th grade white population for both HISD and the State of Texas. By 2002, the Yates Feeder African-American 5th graders improved their scores by 17 points, successfully closing the gap with HISD's and the state's 5th grade white populations.

In 1999, more than a 24 point difference existed between 5th grade African-American student performance on the reading portion of the TAAS in the Yates Feeder and that of the 5th grade white population for both HISD and the State of Texas. By 2002, the Yates Feeder African-American 5th graders improved their scores by 12 points, making significant progress in closing the gap with HISD's and the state's 5th grade white populations.

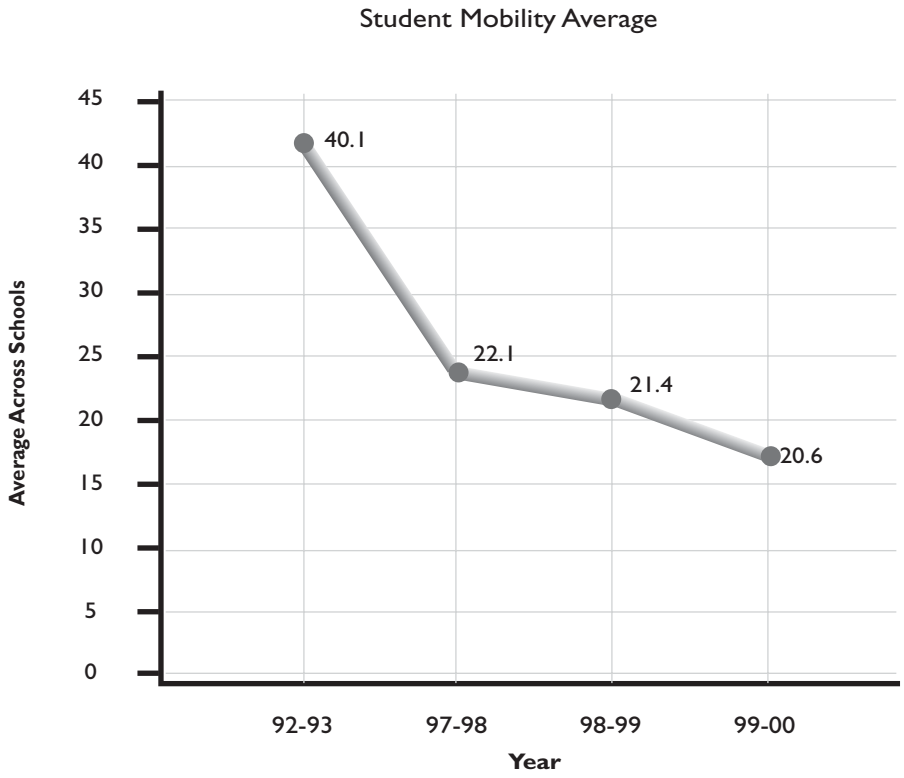
With respect to middle schools, the 8th grade Hispanic population of the Davis Feeder Pattern has also made significant progress in closing the gap with the white 8th grade population of both HISD and the State. In 1999, an approximate 26-point difference existed between the Davis Feeder Pattern Hispanics who took the mathematics portion of the test, and the white TAAS-taking population. In 2002, Davis 8th graders narrowed the gap with the white 8th grade population for HISD and the state to approximately 11 points. With regard to the reading portion of the TAAS test, a 26 point gap existed between Davis 8th graders and the HISD white population in 1999. By 2002, the gap had been narrowed to 8 points.



The number of Project GRAD students meeting or exceeding state standards on the TAAS has increased each year. In 1994, 44 percent of all elementary students passed the mathematics portion on the TAAS, and 63 percent passed reading. In 2002, 93 percent of all GRAD elementary students passed math, and 91 percent passed reading.

Since some have questioned the validity of the TAAS as an effective measure of student achievement, GRAD schools in 1999 began to employ the nationally-normed Stanford 9 in addition to the TAAS. In that year, only three of the 32 elementary schools in the Davis, Yates, and Wheatley Feeders scored above the 50th percentile on the mathematics portion of the test while 16 schools scored below the 40th percentile. By 2001, the situation had reversed, with 20 schools scoring above the 50th percentile while two scored below the 40th percentile. In reading, in 1999, the weighted percentile average of all the elementary schools in the three feeders (8,874 students tested) was 38.3. By 2001, the weighted percentile average had risen to 44.7. The Stanford Nine was renormed in 2002, thus 2002 scores are not comparable to those of prior years.

As mentioned, GRAD strives not only to increase and improve student learning and performance but also to stabilize the communities around GRAD feeder schools. Very recent data from Houston suggest that GRAD is accomplishing just that. As the table below illustrates, in the Davis Feeder Pattern of schools the student mobility rate has dropped considerably since GRAD was implemented. For example, in the 1992–93 school year, 40.1 percent of students in the Davis Feeder schools changed schools at some point during the school year. By the 1999–2000 school year that figure had dropped to 20.6 percent.



Expansion Sites

In 1996, after Project GRAD had led to significant impact in student achievement in Houston, various funders provided support to enable GRAD to expand to other school districts in order to see if its success could be replicated. All the urban schools that subsequently adopted GRAD serve low-income students and were performing below the overall level of performance of other schools in their districts.

The first group of expansion sites is, in chronological order:

- Newark
- Los Angeles
- Columbus
- Atlanta.

Project GRAD began in Newark with the announcement of scholarships in early 1998. As a result, there has been more time than in other expansion cities for GRAD to have had a chance to impact student achievement. When GRAD began in Newark, student achievement at their schools was below the district average and had been so for several years. Test scores, in fact, had been declining. Since GRAD's implementation, Newark has experienced the following:

- 2nd and 3rd grade math and reading achievement as measured by the Stanford 9 test, exceeded the performance levels that would be expected if GRAD had not been implemented. Specifically, the

MDRC evaluation estimates that Project GRAD 3rd grade mathematics scores in 2000 reached the 48th percentile while scores would have only been in the 35th percentile in the absence of implementing GRAD.[12]

- Overall student performance in Project GRAD elementary schools has been increasing at a steady rate. In 2000, a 13 point difference existed in percent passing 4th grade reading (Elementary School Proficiency Assessment Test) between GRAD Newark (Central Feeder) schools and the district. By 2002, GRAD had substantially narrowed this gap to four percent.

Beyond Newark, there are early results that indicate GRAD has taken hold and is producing positive results:

- On the 2000 Georgia High School Graduation Test, Project GRAD Atlanta school Washington High School lagged district pass rates by 10 points and the state by 15. By 2002, the gap versus the district was nearly closed and the gap versus the state was halved. Additionally, improvements in reading, language arts, and mathematics of up to 24.6 points have been noted in 4th, 6th, and 8th grader performance on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) in GRAD schools.
- In Columbus, Ohio, Success for All was introduced as the first academic component in 1999–2000. Compared to baseline 1999 Ohio Proficiency Test scores for Grade 4, Project GRAD Columbus schools have improved nine points on reading and 12 points on writing over four years. Although MOVE-IT Math™ only started classroom implementation in 2003–2004, Project GRAD Columbus schools scored seven points higher on the 2003 OPT than they did in 1999.
- In Los Angeles, average Grade 3 National Percentile Ranking scores on the Stanford-9 have improved 9 points in reading, 23 points in mathematics and 15 points in language. Furthermore, in 2002, every single Project GRAD school in Los Angeles met the Academic Performance Index Growth Target, as compared to every six out of 10 schools for the state of California.

12 MDRC: Adaptation of Project GRAD: Early Implementation Experiences and Emerging Lessons, Chapter 5 page 26.

How Much Does Project GRAD Cost to Implement?

How Much Does GRAD Cost to Implement?

On average, Project GRAD costs approximately 5 to 7 percent of the annual per-student spending in the public schools where implemented. As an example, in a school district that spends an average of $8,000 per child per year, the additional average cost of implementing GRAD in that district would be $400–$560 per child.

By focusing on a carefully selected set of high impact interventions, the Project GRAD program has been designed from the outset to produce significant results cost effectively. A focus on cost effectiveness is critical for a number of reasons. First, GRAD is based on the belief that achieving systemic improvements in educational outcomes requires a broad set of components that span kindergarten through 12th grade. Second, if the program proves to be effective, it is expected that it will be widely replicated. Thus, to ensure the model is sustainable over the long–term, GRAD requires that total program costs should not exceed 5 to 7 percent of total per-pupil spending in a given school district.[13]

How Project GRAD is Being Funded

One of the keys to success is that local GRAD organizations have become focal points for mobilizing multiple constituencies to support its implementation. As a core part of launching the program in a district, the local GRAD organization forms a partnership with the local school district, the business community, private foundations, political leaders, and GRAD USA. Underlying the partnership is a strong, diversified funding base designed to ensure equitable cost sharing, a healthy balance among constituents, and a plan for long term fiscal sustainability.

A sample of Project GRAD program funding follows:

Source	Share
Private sources, including foundations, corporations, and individuals	20%
Local school district, including in–kind contributions	40%
Federal government	25%
Local government	15%

This represents a typical target funding mix over a multi-year period. In especially poor areas, local school districts may contribute a smaller share for the first few years, until the program builds a broad enough support base to make a larger contribution feasible. In these cases, it is still expected that over the long-term, the total district contribution will amount to about 30 percent of program costs, including in-kind contributions.

Uses of Funding

The cost structure of Project GRAD exhibits several key features:

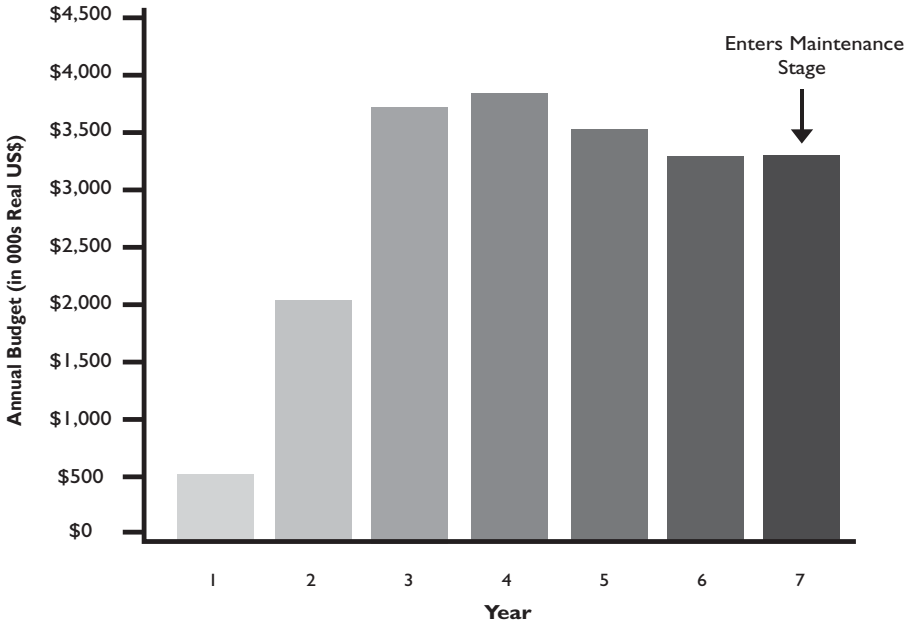
Programmatic focus, with limited expenditures for general management and administration. In a typical site, implementing the program in two feeder patterns, programmatic costs account for about 90 percent of total expenditures. General management and administrative costs comprise the remaining 10 percent.[14]

13 U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1998 Annual Survey of Local Government Finances, Table 10. In Fiscal Year 1998, the most recent year for which figures are available, the 100 largest school districts in the United States spent, on average, $6,016 per pupil for K-12 education. Adjusting this figure by an assumed inflation rate of 3 percent per year, the current figure is approximately $6,575.

14 For the purposes of illustrating the Project GRAD site cost structure, an average site was modeled. The site implements the full complement of GRAD programs across two feeder patterns over a 12-year period. Each feeder pattern consists of 10 schools and 8000 students. As modeled, program costs total $64 M over the period, general and administrative costs $7.6 M.

Installation costs higher than maintenance costs. Installation is the phase when teachers receive initial Annual Budget (in 000s Real US$) training in a component (e.g., Success for All) and materials are purchased for each classroom. During installation, local sites and the schools they serve typically receive significant technical support from the relevant national consulting organization (e.g., the Success for All Foundation). Maintenance is the phase after installation, when all teachers continue to receive ongoing support but only new teachers require initial training. The local GRAD staff typically provides training and support. In addition, material costs during maintenance are limited to replenishment of lost or damaged materials or purchase of updates.

To depict more clearly the relative costs of installation vs. maintenance, the costs for a single feeder system are shown below. After seven years, all components are fully installed and costs reach a steady level.



Cost shifting vs. incremental cost. Over time, reallocating existing school district resources can cover many of the costs of maintaining Project GRAD. Redeploying existing personnel can fill school-based component staff positions. In addition, allocating existing staff development days to GRAD professional development sessions, eliminating the need to pay additional training stipends, can reduce training costs.

Smooth costs based on phased implementation. Implementation is phased at two levels. First, within a given feeder, program components are introduced according to a staggered schedule. Second, within a given city, feeder patterns are phased in over time. This approach is primarily designed to ensure program effectiveness but also helps to level costs. By the time a second feeder is introduced, the first feeder pattern has largely completed its high-cost installation period. As a result, in a typical two-feeder pattern site, costs level out after the first five years of the program.

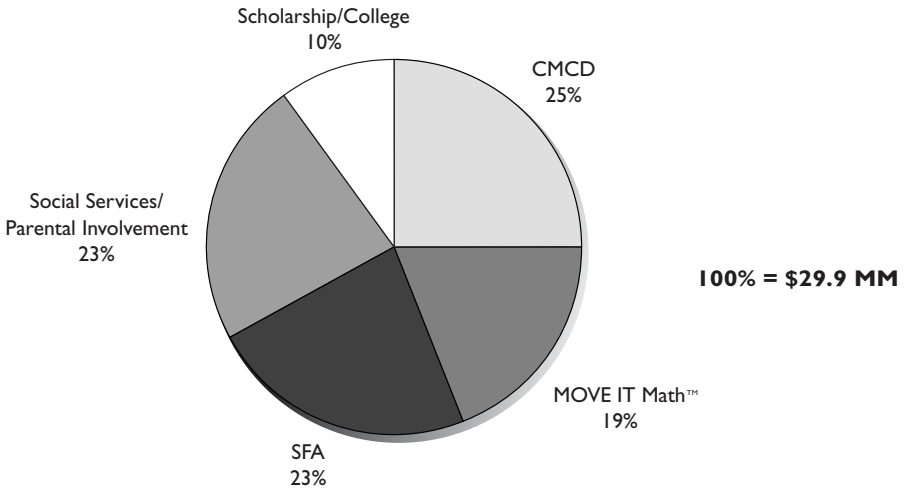
Cost targets normalized by local district per-pupil spending. In assessing the reasonableness of GRAD program costs in a given area, cost targets must be adjusted based on the "cost of doing business" in that area. Labor costs are the most significant element of a local Project GRAD cost structure. Local school district per-pupil spending provides a good indicator of local educational labor market costs, so this figure is used

to set local GRAD cost targets. As mentioned above, in an average-cost district, total per-pupil spending is about $6,600. Project GRAD in an average district should cost five to seven percent of that total—about $400 per student, excluding scholarships. In a high cost district, per pupil costs may exceed $10,000; here Project GRAD costs may be closer to $600 per student. In a typical lower-cost district, with per pupil spending closer to $5,000, GRAD implementation is feasible at a cost of about $300 per student.[15]

GRAD refinements versus core GRAD programming. To balance the need for financial sustainability with the need for continuous program development, GRAD analyzes costs both for core programming and for program refinements. For example, Project GRAD in Houston is currently implementing a fine arts program. As the program is too new to have developed evidence of effectiveness, it has not been incorporated into the core GRAD model and its cost is considered separately in setting cost–per–student targets.

Building local site capacity. While support from national component staff is critical during the installation of programs, Project GRAD has found that building local staff capacity to provide ongoing support is both more effective and less costly. For the start-up year of installation, the costs of the three instructional components (SFA, MIM, and CMCD℠) are almost evenly divided between local site costs and national consulting costs. By the fifth year of implementation, approximately 85 percent of costs are local.

To understand further Project GRAD costs it is also useful to look at the relative costs of program components. As illustrated below, costs are approximately divided evenly among the instructional components (SFA, MIM and CMCD℠) and the Social Services/Parental Involvement component. The instructional components require significant initial training and staffing for ongoing support. While the Social Services/Parental Involvement component does not require a comparable level of intensive teacher training, social needs dictate support staff in every school and multiple support staff in secondary schools. Scholarship and summer programs (excluding the cost of the scholarship endowment) are the least costly of the GRAD components.



15 U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1998 Annual Survey of Local Government Finances, Table 10; 1996 Annual Survey of Local Government Finances, Table 10. In Fiscal Year 1996, per pupil spending in Newark, NJ, was $11,266. In Fiscal Year 1998, several of the lower cost districts spent less than $5000 per student.

Project GRAD's Growth and Plans for Expansion

Project GRAD's Growth and Plans for Expansion

Since it began in Houston in 1993, Project GRAD has expanded in three distinct stages:

During the first model or **demonstration stage**, GRAD was implemented in a single feeder system of schools in Houston, and evidence was gathered there regarding changes in student achievement as each program component in turn was rolled out. After enough promising evidence accrued, GRAD expanded to a second feeder in Houston. Sufficiently positive evidence continued to be gathered, indicating that GRAD could be successfully introduced to other school districts.

This second stage might be thought of as the **responsive or opportunistic stage**, with other sites joining the effort, adopting GRAD, without a strategic scaling-up plan in place. Each of the first five "replication" sites has a unique story. And since GRAD did not have the technical assistance capacity to manage this expansion in a more planned way, they seized the opportunities presented to them through these idiosyncratic circumstances. During this phase, GRAD expanded into four additional school districts including Newark and Los Angeles. In Newark, Lucent Technologies was eager to bring something promising to Newark, knew about GRAD, and presented it to the Newark school district as a possibility. In California, a family foundation in Los Angeles wanted to fund an education reform effort in a low-performing sub-district, learned about GRAD through a meeting with a Ford Foundation official, and then took the lead to bring it to Los Angeles.

The third stage is called the **strategic stage.** During the initial years of this stage, more new GRAD cities entered and are entering the GRAD network in a more measured way. During the course of the second stage, GRAD developed a national intermediary, GRAD USA, to manage expansion plans and provide technical assistance to existing sites. That entity now has a process in place that potential GRAD cities must go through in order to apply for inclusion. This includes a staff member for new sites who works with potential cities during a planning year and a formal application process that a site needs to follow before it can be "admitted." This process also includes a formal and binding letter of agreement between GRAD and the new site.

At the close of the 2003–2004 school year, Project GRAD USA is serving more than 135,000 students in school districts in 12 cities. Projected expansion through the 2006–2007 school year will culminate in GRAD USA's serving over a quarter of a million students in 20 cities. (See chart on following page.) This expansion plan is the result of the program's ability to reach the following important national milestones:

- GRAD cities exist on each coast
- Project GRAD has been adopted as a reform model by an entire state (Ohio)
- Project GRAD has proven its viability in diverse demographic settings and situations.

Project GRAD USA operates on the premise that it will continue to expand for the foreseeable future based upon the following assumptions:

- Three cities will be added per year
- One out of three GRAD cities will add one feeder each year
- GRAD will be adopted as a reform model by other states.

Expansion into a new city is driven by a combination of several factors. First, the basic criterion for expansion into a site is the presence of an economically disadvantaged population in its schools. The GRAD mission is to provide high quality public education and ensure high school graduation and college success for schools with such a strong need. Second, there must be a perceived need in the community and a strong climate for reform within the school district and among business and community leaders. Further, the key stakeholders must demonstrate a shared perspective about the GRAD structural and program components. Also, there must be demonstrated community support in the form of financial commitments and in-kind contributions.

Expansion into new feeders in existing cities is based upon other criteria. First, the initial feeder must be firmly rooted, with a record of success, including strong component implementation. Second, the local Project GRAD management and organizational capacity must be strong. Finally, there must be a sound financial base to support additional program implementation and scholarships.

Because the heart of all Project GRAD USA expansion is successful component implementation, component capacity is a key issue for all expansion plans. Because component partners may lack capacity to keep up with its growth, Project GRAD USA offers the following support:

- Component implementation support
- Participation in program development
- Building of local site capacity
- Ongoing evaluation
- Long-term dissemination of results in order to influence public information.

The most basic of these steps is Project GRAD USA's component support model. GRAD's approach begins with selectively providing support for strengthening core elements of its component partner. When more support is needed, GRAD works closely with its component partners to help in filling identified gaps. Such work may include developing hiring criteria, providing professional development, developing materials, and creating financial and staffing models and projections. Where major support is required, Project GRAD USA may license core content, assume responsibility for all program implementation, and may assume responsibility for some program development.

Through careful planning, Project GRAD USA anticipates expansion both into new cities and into new feeders in existing cities, the success of which will be facilitated through well-supported component implementation. Expansion will likely be as outlined on the following chart:

Year	School Districts	Schools	Number of Feeders	Number of Students
1994	1	9	1	6,320
1995	1	9	1	6,320
1996	2	24	2	15,846
1997	2	33	3	22,303
1998	3	47	4	41,184
1999	5	89	8	61,661
2000	6	117	10	78,169
2001	7	149	13	101,679
2002	8	154	14	105,246
2003	*12*	*210*	*20*	*135,000*
2004	*15*	*242*	*25*	*170,000*
2005	*18*	*282*	*30*	*200,000*
2006	*21*	*322*	*35*	*230,000*
2007	*24*	*262*	*40*	*260,000*
2008	*27*	*402*	*45*	*290,000*

projections in italics

Assistance to New Project GRAD Sites

The New Site Development process has been carefully defined to ensure successful implementation in new cities. The process for becoming a Project GRAD site takes anywhere from six to 15 months. The length of preparation time is dependent on the prospective site's resources and readiness to proceed. A Project GRAD USA New Site Coordinator provides ongoing technical assistance to local stake-holders as the prospective site works towards establishing the buy-in and structural elements that will enable the program to succeed.

The New Site Coordinator creates an Action Plan and New Site Implementation Check List outlining the various steps that the local site needs to complete. The New Site Coordinator works with key stakeholders through four distinct phases of implementation (Exploratory, Development, Approval, and Implementation). The following is a summary of the assistance that the national organization provides to a site as it considers becoming a part of Project GRAD USA:

Exploratory Phase

The goal of the Exploratory Phase is to provide prospective sites with an understanding of Project GRAD and assemble a working group of key stakeholders, including administrators, district personnel, potential funders and community leaders. This is achieved through orientations, tours of existing Project GRAD sites, and ongoing dialogue with the key stakeholders in the prospective site.

Development Phase

The Development Phase begins once a city has made the initial determination to apply to become a Project GRAD site. The main goal of the Development Phase is to formulate a local plan of implementation. This plan includes finalizing the feeder pattern to be targeted, developing a strategic plan for the roll-out of the five programmatic components, collecting baseline data and beginning the establishment of the 501(c)(3) organization. The plan also includes a three-year budget and a preliminary development plan. The New Site Coordinator and the working group continue to expand the base of support for the proposed implementation by focusing on building relationships with the identified feeder schools and any additional stakeholders. The working group, in conjunction with Project GRAD USA staff, identifies funding sources for the first year of implementation including the scholarship component. The final step is to write a proposal outlining the GRAD implementation process including a final budget for the first few years of operation.

Approval Phase

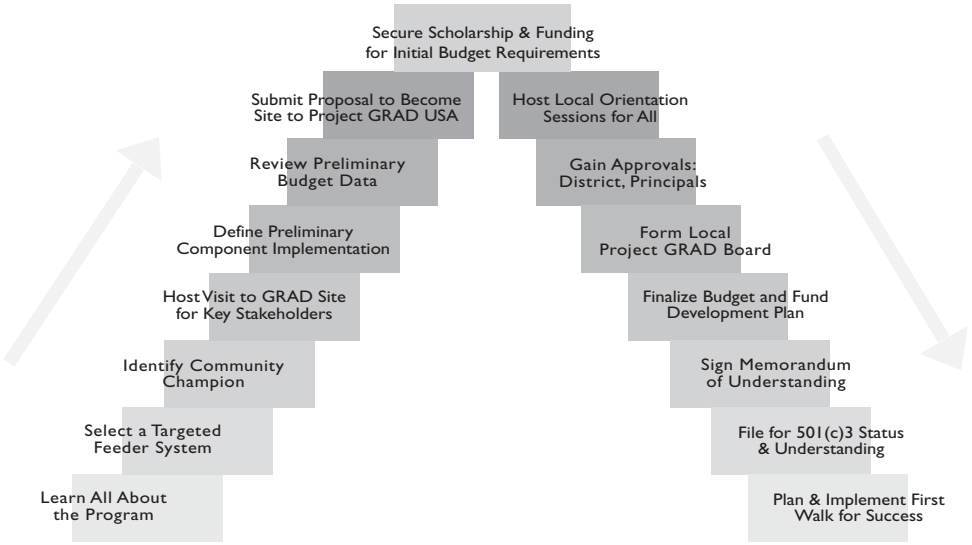
The ultimate goal of the new sites process is to obtain final approval to proceed with the local GRAD implementation by various stakeholders. A final proposal is submitted to Project GRAD USA for endorsement, while the working group obtains the following approvals at the local level:

- School district approval
- 100 percent principal approval
- 70 percent teacher approval.

Once the approvals have been obtained from the district, principals and teachers, the focus then turns to building the necessary infrastructure. GRAD USA plays a critical role in establishing the local 501(c)(3) organization and assisting the new site in hiring and training the Executive Director.

The final step in becoming a Project GRAD site is signing a Memorandum of Understanding between Project GRAD USA and the local Project GRAD Site. The local site also signs an agreement with the school district outlining the proposed implementation process.

The following figure provides a summary of the various steps that are involved in becoming a Project GRAD site. It is important to note that these steps are not necessarily sequential.



Implementation Phase

The Implementation Stage begins with a public event announcing the establishment of Project GRAD in the new city. The focus of the announcement is on the scholarship component targeting the incoming freshman class (9th graders) of the feeder high school. The New Site Coordinator helps to plan this event and also begins to forge a close working relationship with the newly hired local Executive Director. The New Site Coordinator focuses on building local capacity to manage the rollout of the components. Project GRAD USA places extensive focus on providing continuous training and support for the local Executive Director and building the infrastructure of the newly formed nonprofit organization. The New Site Coordinator and the Executive Director facilitate a leadership institute for the principals of the Project GRAD feeder. This serves as an opportunity for the establishment of a strong vertical-planning group that will be instrumental in ensuring a successful implementation at the K–12 schools. The GRAD team also meets on a monthly basis with the key district contact in order to ensure a strong collaboration at the local level. The Coordinator provides ongoing technical support and monitoring via weekly conference calls and monthly visits. Implementation of program components is carried out according to the plan outlined in the GRAD USA proposal.

The implementation of the five program components varies in each city in order to target the most critical needs identified by the community. The following table provides a sample implementation plan that is typical of a new site.

Implementation Year	Component / Activity
Year 1	• Establish 501(c)3 • Hire and Train Executive Director • Assist Executive Director with Hiring of Key Positions • Announce Scholarship Component • Implement Social Services/ Parent Involvement Component • Implement Summer Institute • Offer Principal Leadership Institute • Initiate Literacy Start–Up–Elementary
Year 2	• Initiate Classroom Management & Cooperative Discipline℠, Elementary School Preparation • Start Literacy Implementaion • Initiate Mathematics Preparation
Year 3	• Start Mathematics Implementation • Initiate Classroom Management & Cooperative Discipline℠, Secondary Preparation
Year 4	• Start Classroom Management & Cooperative Discipline℠, Secondary Preparation

Conclusion

Conclusion

Project GRAD is a comprehensive, nonprofit, cost-effective program with a record of improving the academic achievement of students from low-income backgrounds. GRAD works with students from Kindergarten through college, within feeder systems of schools—all the elementary and middle schools that "feed" individual high schools. GRAD brings to these schools an integrated approach to the teaching of literacy, mathematics, and classroom management. It contributes to higher academic standards and offers social services to students and their families. In addition, GRAD makes college scholarships available to graduates of GRAD high schools. GRAD helps stabilize communities through working partnerships with parents, colleges and universities, corporations, and faith-based organizations.

What makes Project GRAD different and perhaps unique is directly tied to its theory of change. GRAD has found that an impact of significant magnitude in an initial feeder within a school district will spread to other feeders, and thereby change can and will become systemic. During the 10 years of GRAD in Houston, achievement gaps in reading and mathematics have been erased or greatly reduced. In other cities, results are following a similar course. Most newer GRAD sites are also improving student performance and have become infused with new promise. These results and the low incremental costs and a broad base of support help ensure that GRAD can be sustained over time. Because of Project GRAD, families are finding new hope in their local schools; teachers are proud of their work and their students; and students are learning, graduating, and going to college.

In short, Project GRAD works.

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Brown University
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