



EDUCATION & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT KEY FINDING

EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS IN PROJECT STEP MORE LIKELY TO BE ADMITTED TO HIGH PERFORMING HIGH SCHOOLS

WHEDCo's Project STEP (Students Toward Educational Promise) is an After School program at PS/MS 218 for middle school students (in 6th through 8th grade) that combines critical thinking, social activism and academic enrichment. Through service-learning projects, students learn about an issue and then take on the role of advocates in their community. Eighth graders also receive comprehensive and in-depth support for the high school admissions process in the form of high school fairs (also open to 7th graders), one-on-one sessions with WHEDCo staff and exam preparation for the Specialized High School Admissions Test. The goal of this support is to help students find out about and gain admission to high performing schools, which are defined by proficiency tests, college readiness performance and graduation rates.¹

In 2005-2006, Project STEP served 65 students, 25 of whom were in the eighth grade. Twenty-three of these students (92%) were admitted to high performing high schools, which included one of the nine Specialized High Schools of New York City and one private school (Table 1). In the following year, 79% of 33 students enrolled in Project STEP were admitted to high performing schools, including two Specialized High Schools (Table 2).

In order to gauge the impact of the program on students, we compared high school admissions for these students

Table 1: 2005-2006 Admittance into High Performing High Schools (All Eighth Grade Students)

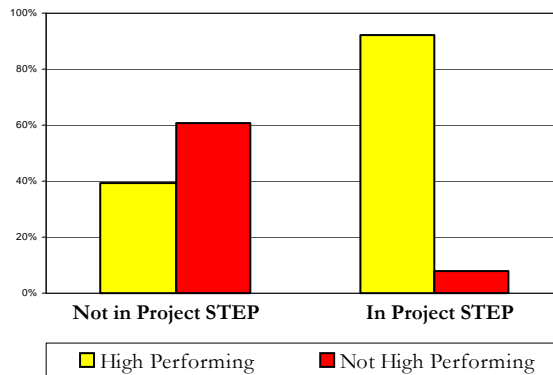


Table 2: 2006-2007 Admittance into High Performing High Schools (All Eighth Grade Students)

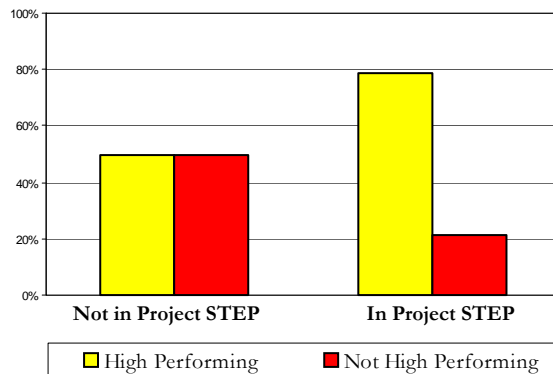
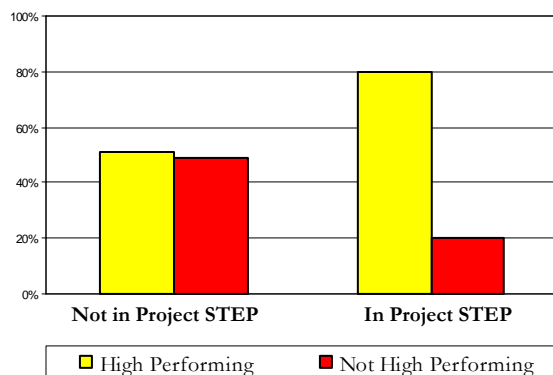


Table 3: 2006-2007 Admittance into High Performing High Schools (Only Eighth Grade Students Scoring Level 3 or Level 4)



to those for eighth graders at the same school who were not enrolled in Project STEP. In order to make a valid comparison, this analysis needed to take account of differences between these two groups in academic performance. To control for academic performance, we used the English Language Arts state assessment test used to measure student progress as defined by the New York State Learning Standards. These tests assign students to performance levels 1 through 4 based on their scores. Levels 3 and 4 are defined as "meeting the Learning Standards" and "meeting the Learning Standards with distinction". When looking at only eighth grade students in PS/MS 218 who are scoring at these higher levels, we find a significant difference between the high school outcomes for students participating and not participating in Project STEP.

Table 3 shows high school admission results for the subset of students who scored levels 3 and 4. Among this subset, eighty percent of students who are participating in Project STEP were admitted into a high-performing high school, compared to only about fifty percent of those not participating in the program. This means that even if a student is doing well in school, his or her chances of getting into a good high school are significantly impacted by whether or not that student participates in Project STEP. This difference also appears when controlling for

(Continued on reverse)

HIGH SCHOOL ADMISSIONS (CONTINUED)

report card grades instead of standardized tests.

A second important finding shows that while middle school students on average improve their grades over time at PS/MS 218, students enrolled in Project STEP see larger gains. Between November and April of the 2006-2007 school year, there was a significant improvement in the average report card grade for all middle school students at the school. In November, students enrolled in Project STEP earned an average grade of 80% and students

not enrolled in Project STEP earned an average grade of 73%. Five months later, Project STEP students had improved their grades to an average of 83% and non-Project STEP students to 75%.

Though both groups improved over the year, the average improvement for Project STEP students was *significantly greater* than it was for those not enrolled in Project STEP. Students in Project STEP raised their grades by an average of 3.3%, versus the 1.9% average for students not enrolled in Project STEP. This

means a student earning a 77% in November who was enrolled in Project STEP would have been significantly more likely to have raised her grade above 80% by April than a student not enrolled in Project STEP.

Therefore, if a student was enrolled in Project STEP, he or she was more likely to show a greater improvement in grades than if that student were not enrolled in the program. This means Project STEP is not only helping students gain admission to high performing high schools, it is

also helping younger students in middle school to improve their grades and thereby improve their admissions options. Project STEP is consequently a crucial contributor to the academic success of middle school students.

¹ Sources include the *Directory of New York City Public High Schools*, in-sideschools.org, 2007 *U.S. News & World Report* "America's Best High Schools" and staff interviews conducted over the past year

Selected Project STEP High School Admittance School Years 2005-2006 and 2006-2007		
High School Name	Type	Graduation Rate
All Hallows High School	Catholic	100.0
Aquinas High School	Catholic	95.0
Bronx High School of Science	Public *	99.6
Beacon High School	Public	91.5
Foreign Language Academy of Global Studies	Public **	77.9
High School of Fashion Industries	Public **	80.3
High School for Math, Science and Engineering at CCNY	Public *	97.6
High School of Economics and Finance	Public **	92.1
Jacqueline Kennedy-Onassis High School	Public **	75.2
Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics	Public **	84.4
Manhattan Village Academy	Public **	97.0
St. Jean Baptiste High School	Catholic	98.0
Stuyvesant High School	Public *	99.2
Trevor Day School	Private	100.0
* Specialized High School of New York City		
** 2007 <i>U.S. News & World Report</i> America's Best High School		
Reported graduation rate represents the percent of students who graduated with either a Local or Regents' Diploma for the latest year available.		
Eighth graders who were not enrolled in Project Step were admitted to high schools with a median graduation rate below 60%.		