

Introduction

Get Focused...Stay Focused!TM (GFSF) is a high school program designed to develop the skills and knowledge that lead to high school graduation, college readiness and completion, and successful entry into the workforce. Despite strong theoretical underpinnings, some supporting empirical research, and extensive testimony from school officials and students about the value of the program, the GFSF program has never been subjected to a rigorous evaluation. The evaluation study is designed to assess both the implementation of the GFSF program and its impact on a series of student outcomes related to performance and success in high school. This report summarizes activities and findings from the third year of the evaluation study conducted in 2019.

Evaluation Design

Twenty schools from throughout California were recruited to participate in the evaluation. Half of the schools were randomly assigned to treatment group that began the GFSF program in the fall of 2016 and the other half to a control group that were eligible to begin the program in the fall of 2017. The evaluation compares 9th grade students in the treatment (cohort 1) schools that received the program in the 2016-17 school year with 9th grade students in the control (cohort 2) schools who did not receive the program in the 2016-17 school year.

To study program implementation, we analyzed the use of the online tool, My10yearPlan.com, by school students and school staff from the 10 cohort 1 schools from 2016-17 (the first year of program implementation) through December 2019 (the fourth year of program implementation). We also developed an online survey of school staff that was sent to all schools in California that were using the GFSF program in 2018-19, not just evaluation schools. Usable data was received from 104 respondents at 73 schools.

To study student outcomes we analyzed administrative data from the evaluation schools that we obtained from Cal-PASS, including data files on attendance, behavior (suspensions), and course performance (credits earned, fails, and GPA). To date we have received data for the years 2016-17 and 2017-18.

We faced a number of challenges in obtaining and using the Cal-PASS data:

- One was getting all 20 evaluation schools to submit data to Cal-PASS. Although Cal-PASS collects the same data that districts are required to submit to the California Department of Education, two of the Cohort 2 schools (Los Banos and Willits) never submitted data (see Table 1).
- A second challenge was that some districts didn't submit complete data for the two years of data we received from Cal-PASS. We received attendance data and course data from 18 schools in 2016-17 and course data from 18 schools in 2017-18, but attendance data for only 15 schools.
- A third was that there were missing course data for a large number of students in some schools. For example, at Galt High School we had 240 student attendance records in 2017-18, but only 179 student course records. At Loyalton High School, we had only 1 student course record in 2017-18 compared to 29 student attendance records.
- A final challenge was identifying the GFSF course that students took in order to determine the number of credits and grades students received. By reviewing students' course data we were able to identify the GFSF course by the following titles: GFSF, Life Skills, College and Career Readiness, Future Focus, Success 101; and Building and Finding Success.

Findings on Program Implementation

The evaluation yielded several interesting findings about how the GFSF program was implemented:

1. Not all schools implemented the program schoolwide.

Although all 10 cohort 1 schools signed a Pledge to require all ninth grade students to take the freshman GFSF course, an examination of the Cal-PASS course file revealed that 23% of the students at Alhambra High School and 30% of the students at Jurupa High School did not take the freshman course (see Table 2).

This compromised the evaluation design which compared the performance of all students in cohort 1 schools, assuming all students in those schools took the freshman course, with the performance of students in cohort 2 schools, assuming none of the students in those schools took the freshman course.¹

2. Students' use of the online tool, My10yearPlan.com, declined over time and varied widely among schools

In the first year of the evaluation study (2016-17), almost all (2,925) students in the 10 cohort 1 schools registered an account on My10yearPlan.com (see Table 3). However, only about half of registered students (57.6%) completed 80 percent of the assignments and only one-third (32%) completed all the activities. In subsequent years, student use declined further, falling to about 40% in 2017-18 (1255/2925) and only about 10% (318/2925) in 2018-19 (Table 4).² These averages mask considerable variation among schools (and among teachers. For example, the percentage of students completing all their activities in 2016-17 varied from a low of zero percent in three schools to a high of 50 percent in three other schools.³

3. Staff use of My10yearPlan.com was limited.

Nine of the 10 cohort 1 schools showed extensive use of My10yearPlan.com by all school staff in the 2018-19 school year (Table 5). However, there were only three schools where Module 2 teachers used the online tool. Other school staff, including school executives and counselors, also used the tool, although it may be focused on the freshman and Module 1 courses. Outside of My10yearPlan.com, we have no way of knowing how many cohort 1 schools offered the modules and how many chapters were taught.

4. Survey data show school staff are generally pleased with the program.

Data from a survey of 73 GFSF schools throughout California revealed that most school staff were highly supportive of the program. Among all 104 respondents:

- The vast majority reported that the program had a positive impact on students
- Fewer reported that it had a noticeable impact on their school, with some stating that it needed to be fully implemented first
- Some suggested that My10yearPlan.com needed revision

Among lead teachers (N=42):

- 88% reported that the principal was involved and supportive of the program
- 80% of teachers received their professional development through AI sponsored training
- 41% of teachers and counselors reported using data from surveys and online 10-year plans

Among ninth grade teachers (N=60):

- 51% reported that students were eligible to receive dual enrollment credit
- Less than half reported that students completed all the assignments and activities
- More than 80% reported that students were required to complete their 10-year plan to pass the course
- 68% reported that they discussed 10-year plans with students individually daily or weekly

Among module teachers (N=42):

- 40% taught Module 1; 25% taught Module 2; 14% Module 3; and 21% taught a combination
- 52% integrated the curriculum into an existing course
- 35% discussed the 10-year plans with students daily or weekly
- 71% reported that students were required to access and update their online 10-year plans

¹ Actually there were a few students who transferred from cohort 2 schools to cohort 1 schools during the 2016-17 school year and therefore took the freshman course.

² Data for 2019-20 only cover part of the year so we do not comment on it at this point.

³ Fontana USD stopped all online activities after about month into the project over confidentiality concerns.

Findings on Student Outcomes

We examined a wide range of student outcomes using Cal-PASS data files on attendance, behavior, and course-taking. We employed a series of statistical (HLM) models to estimate the effects of GFSF on both schools and students. Several important findings emerged from this analysis, which we illustrate with a single student outcome variable that measures the number of A-G units that students earned in 2017-18 when most were enrolled in the 10th grade.

1. There was considerable variation in average student outcomes among schools.

Consistent with other studies, there was considerable variability in student outcomes associated with students as well as the schools they attend. For example, the analysis found that 19% of the total variability in the number of A-G credits that students earned in 2017-18 was attributed to the schools that they attended, with the remaining 81% attributed to their own characteristics (Table 6, Model 1). So while the overall grand mean (the mean of all the estimated school means) for this outcome was 3.46 units, the estimated school means ranged from 1.63 units to 5.28 units. These estimates are consistent with the actual means for the 18 schools in our analysis, which ranged from 0 to 5.09 (see Table 7).

2. There were no significant differences between cohort 1 and cohort 2 schools on a wide range of student outcomes.

Our statistical model estimated that the average number of A-G units earned by students attending cohort 1 schools were somewhat lower (-.19) and not significantly different than the 3.55 units earned by students attending cohort 2 schools (see Table 6, Model 2). Similar results were found on other outcomes.

3. Across all students in the 18 evaluation schools, students who took the GFSF freshman course performed better than students who did not take the freshman course, but the effect was not statistically significant and it varied widely among schools.

The raw data reveal that students who took the freshman course earned 4.19 A-G units in grade 10, compared to 3.56 units for students who did not take the freshman course, a differences of .63 units (Table 7). However, the statistical model estimated an average impact of taking the freshman course was .31 units and the effect was not statistically significant (Table 6, Model 3). Moreover, the effect varied significantly, ranging from a low of -2.30 units (which means students who took the course actually earned fewer units than students who did not take the course) to a high of 2.92 units. This variation is illustrated by comparing students in three cohort 1 schools that had at least 30 students who did not take the freshman course: Alhambra, Jurupa Hills, and Mark Keppel (Table 7). In Alhambra and Jurupa Hills, students who took the freshman course earned more A-G units than students who did not take the freshman course, whereas in Mark Keppel, students who took the course earned fewer A-G units than students who did not take the freshman course (although students stopped using the online activities one month into the study).

Conclusions

We can draw several conclusions from the evaluation study. First, it was extremely difficult to get complete Cal-PASS data for all 20 schools in the evaluation. Two schools never provided data and other schools provided incomplete data. This compromised the research design, which was premised on having complete data for all 20 schools. Second, the program was implemented unevenly. Although all 10 cohort 1 schools signed a pledge to implement the program schoolwide in 2016-17, two schools had a sizable number of students who did not take the program. This also compromised the research design, which compared cohort 1 (treatment) schools with cohort 2 (control) schools. Third, the online tool, My10yearPlan.com was not widely used by students or staff, especially after the first year of program implementation. Only six cohort 1 schools reported using Module 1 in 2017-18 and only three schools reported using Module 2 in 2018-19. Fourth, the program did not show any significant effects on a wide range of student outcomes. The statistical analysis did demonstrate wide variability in student outcomes among schools and wide variability on the impact of taking the GFSF freshman course within schools. This variable impact could be related to the uneven implementation of the program in the 10 cohort 1 schools. This is also consistent with the research literature, which finds variability in program implementation is the rule rather than the exception.

TABLES

Table 1. Cal-PASS Data Inventory

		Enrollment (from Dataquest)	Attendance/Course (from Cal-PASS)	
High School	District	2016-17	2016-17	2017-18
Alhambra	Alhambra USD	581	608/460	565/434
Dunsmuir	Dunsmuir JUHSD	20	18/12	15/10
Elk Creek	Stony Creek JUSD	5	5/4	4/3
Galt	Galt Joint Union USD	249	251/199	240/179
Jurupa Hills	Fontana USD	531	579/458	524/413
Loyalton	Sierra-Plumas JUSD	30	30/1	29/1
Mark Keppel	Alhambra USD	558	570/432	555/429
River City	Washington USD	552	568/443	0/596
Temple City	Temple City USD	505	521/54	488/34
Tioga	Big Oak Flat - Groveland USD	13	12/10	10/6
Cohort 1 (GFSF) Schools Total		3044	3162/1630	2430/1509
Anderson Valley	Anderson Valley USD	29	32/27	28/25
Avenal	Reef-Sunset USD	148	154/125	0/103
Don Pedro	Big Oak Flat - Groveland USD	14	15/13	9/8
Henry J. Kaiser	Fontana USD	540	596/404	490/344
Los Banos	Los Banos USD	341		
Marysville	Marysville JUSD	269	282/205	0/198
San Gabriel	Alhambra USD	534	568/442	507/398
Summit	Fontana USD	604	662/492	574/439
Trinity	Trinity Alps USD	92	99/63	78/54
Willits Charter	Willits USD	7	Withdrew	
Cohort 2 (Control) Schools Total		2578	2408/1566	1686/1268
Total Sample		5622	5570/3196	4166/2777

NOTE: Attendance data are from the first school attended each year.

Table 2. Cohort 1 Schools GFSF course taking, 2016-17

School	District	9 th Grade Enrollment	GFSF Course	
			One semester	Two semesters
Alhambra	Alhambra USD	581	77%	0%
Dunsmuir	Dunsmuir JUHSD	20	92%	0%
Elk Creek	Stony Creek JUSD	5	0%	100%
Galt	Galt Joint Union USD	249	93%	3%
Jurupa Hills	Fontana USD	531	70%	0%
Loyalton	Sierra-Plumas JUSD	30	*	*
Mark Keppel	Alhambra USD	558	91%	0%
River City	Washington USD	552	2%	93%
Temple City	Temple City USD	505	93%	0%
Tioga	Big Oak Flat - Groveland USD	13	100%	0%

*Insufficient data.

Table 3. Number of Students Using My10yearplan.com, 2016-17

School	Enrollment	Registered	Completed 80%		Completed all	
			Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Alhambra High School	581	479	365	76.2%	234	48.9%
Dunsmuir High School	20	16	5	31.3%	1	6.3%
Elk Creek High School	5	5	1	20.0%	0	0.0%
Galt High School	249	251	188	74.9%	90	35.9%
Jurupa Hills High School	531	511	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Loyalton High School	30	30	2	6.7%	0	0.0%
Mark Keppel High School	558	552	421	76.3%	249	45.1%
River City High School	552	534	241	45.1%	87	16.3%
Temple City High School	505	505	425	84.2%	253	50.1%
Tioga	13	42	37	88.1%	23	54.8%
TOTAL	3044	2925	1686	57.6%	937	32.0%

Table 4. Number of Students Using My10yearplan.com in 2017-2018 thru 2019-2020

School	Number of students logged in			Average logins per student		
	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
Alhambra High School	243	6	0	5.2	5.8	0
Dunsmuir High School	9	8	8	18.6	33.9	7.9
Elk Creek High School	0*	0	0	0	0	0
Galt High School	174	1	1	5.6	9	1
Jurupa Hills High School	0*	0	0	0	0	0
Loyalton High School	29*	24**	10**	10.6	2.1	1.1
Mark Keppel High School	404	7**	4**	1.8	2.9	1.3
River City High School	368	55**	174**	3.1	1.1	1.7
Temple City High School	16*	205**	0**	1.9	1.2	0
Tioga	12	12	0	3.3	7.5	0
TOTAL	1255	318	197			

*No students or classes using My10yearPlan.com Module 1

**No students or classes using My10yearPlan.com Modules 2 or 3

Table 5. Staff Use of My10yearPlan.Com, 2018-19

School	All staff using	Number of Module 2 teachers (using)	Total logins	School Executive (total logins)	Counselor (total logins)
Alhambra	7	0		0	1 (1)
Dunsmuir	3	1 (1)*	84	1 (2)	0
Elk Creek	3	0		1 (8)	0
Galt	10	3 (1)	9	1(43)	0
Jurupa Hills	Not used				
Loyalton	3	0		1 (6)	1 (3)
Mark Keppel	13	0		1 (18)	6 (6)
River City	13	0		1 (7)	0
Temple City	7	0		1 (24)	0
Tioga	4	1 (1)	11	1 (22)*	1 (12)*

*Also listed as a CCE teacher.

Table 6. HLM results for A-G credits**Model 1: Unconditional model**

<i>Fixed Effect</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Variance</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Overall school mean	3.46		0.001
<i>Random Effect</i>			
School-level		0.86 (19%)	0.001
Student-level		3.66 (81%)	

95% range of plausible values for school means = $(3.46 \pm 1.96 (0.93)) = (1.63, 5.28)$

Model 2: Means-as-outcomes model

<i>Fixed Effect</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Variance</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Overall school mean			
Mean for cohort 2 schools	3.46		0.001
Cohort 1 school effect	-.19		0.680
<i>Random Effect</i>			
School-level		0.98	0.001
Student-level		3.66	

Model 3: Random-Coefficient model

<i>Fixed Effect</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Variance</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Overall school mean	3.51		0.001
Student took GFSF course	0.31		0.482
<i>Random Effect</i>			
School-level			
School mean		0.72	0.001
GFSF course effect		1.78	0.001
Student-level		3.58	

95% range of plausible values for GFSF course effect = $(.31 \pm 1.96 (1.33)) = (-2.30, 2.92)$

Table 7. Mean number of A-G credits by school and GFSF course, 2017-18

High School	District	School mean	Students who took freshman course	Students who did not take freshman course*
Alhambra	Alhambra USD	3.85	4.08	3.07
Dunsmuir	Dunsmuir JUHSD	0.00		
Elk Creek	Stony Creek JUSD	0.64		
Galt	Galt Joint Union USD	4.13		
Jurupa Hills	Fontana USD	3.46	3.39	3.63
Loyalton	Sierra-Plumas JUSD	1.00		
Mark Keppel	Alhambra USD	3.91	4.06	2.37
River City	Washington USD	5.09		
Temple City	Temple City USD	4.10		
Tioga	Big Oak Flat - Groveland USD	3.50		
Cohort 1 (GFSF) Schools Mean		2.94		
Anderson Valley	Anderson Valley USD	3.29		
Avenal	Reef-Sunset USD	3.71		
Don Pedro	Big Oak Flat - Groveland USD	3.44		
Henry J. Kaiser	Fontana USD	3.55		
Marysville	Marysville JUSD	2.99		
San Gabriel	Alhambra USD	3.83		
Summit	Fontana USD	3.73		
Trinity	Trinity Alps USD	3.87		
Cohort 2 (Control) Schools Mean		3.55		
All Schools		3.21		
All Students		3.86	4.19	3.56

*Data are only shown for cohort 1 schools that had at least 30 students who did not take the GFSF freshman course.