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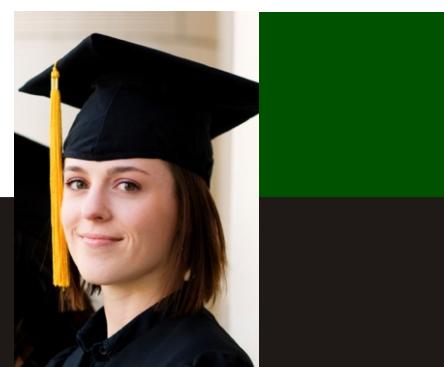
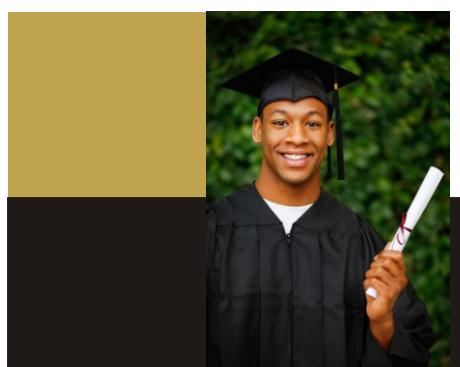
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An Independent Evaluation of Georgia's Performance Learning Centers®



Copies of the complete evaluation reports from ICF International are available on our website:
www.cisga.org

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In 2002, Communities In Schools of Georgia opened the first Performance Learning Centers® (PLCs), a unique non-traditional learning environment for high school students who were not succeeding in traditional schools.

An independent evaluation of the PLCs completed in February 2009 by ICF International demonstrates that the PLCs are having positive results for students and the school districts they serve.

About Performance Learning Centers®

- ❖ Developed in 2002 by Communities In Schools (CIS) of Georgia, Performance Learning Centers® (PLC) are non-traditional learning environments for high school students who are not succeeding in traditional schools. Small academic settings, business like environments, and self-directed learning enable students to stay in school, excel academically, and graduate with a marketable skill.
- ❖ Through a community-oriented, real-world focus, PLCs provide students the opportunity to participate in dual enrollment programs with local colleges and technical institutes and explore career options with the help of community partners through job shadowing, local internships, and career fair events. The combination of high expectations and strong support are the foundation of the PLC model and make it possible for at-risk students to get back on track, and graduate with the skills necessary to succeed in college or the workforce.
- ❖ The Performance Learning Center model is now being replicated within CIS communities in five states.

About the Evaluation

The ICF International evaluation of Performance Learning Centers employed multiple methodologies, including:

- ❖ A district-level quasi-experimental study, which compared graduation and dropout rates for school districts that implemented PLCs to districts without PLCs.
- ❖ A survey of PLC and CIS staff, which was designed to gauge fidelity to the PLC model and to determine how PLCs were implementing the program.
- ❖ A case study based on two PLC sites, which was designed to determine how and where PLCs were having an effect on student outcomes.

Findings from the Survey and Case Study

- ❖ **Key Services.** Survey data identified tutoring/academic assistance and life skills as key services in ensuring students stay in school and helping them excel academically.
- ❖ **Effectiveness of the Model.** Case studies documented the effectiveness of the PLC model in promoting individual student success by providing facilitated self-paced instruction, individualized attention, and strong connections between the student, PLC, and the community. These areas were considered to increase on-time graduation and result in increased student aspirations focused on both continuing education and expanded career options.
- ❖ **Importance of the PLC Services Coordinator.** Staff, community partners, parents, and students repeatedly noted the Services Coordinator as a key driver of success. The coordinator performs many important functions, and without the help of the Services Coordinator, the PLC struggles to cover the necessary responsibilities.
- ❖ **Cost Effectiveness.** A comparison of per pupil cost of the PLC model to that of traditional schools demonstrates that PLCs operate at the same or similar levels of expenditure.

Methodology: The Quasi-Experimental Study

Comparison Districts. The ICF team used a technique called propensity score matching to create matched pairs of PLC and Non-PLC districts for the quasi-experimental study. Propensity score matching is a highly rigorous and well-respected research technique that allows for greater confidence in identifying differences between groups; PLC and non-PLC districts were matched on a range of baseline characteristics, allowing differences in outcomes to be more confidently attributed to the presence of PLCs in the districts. ICF was able to match 14 of the 26 PLC districts for the analysis.

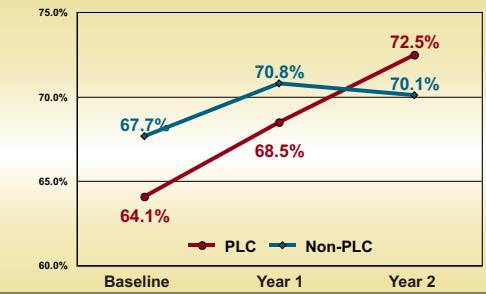
Measuring Improvement. Changes in graduation rates and dropout rates for PLC districts were compared to those for the matched non-PLC one and two years after implementation. Net change is calculated by subtracting the difference in matched PLC districts' post and baseline scores from the difference in matched non-PLCs' post and baseline scores.

Strength of the Relationship - Effect Size. Since statistical significance is largely a function of sample size (i.e., with small samples it is difficult to demonstrate statistical significance and with large samples it is difficult not to have statistically significant findings), researchers use effect sizes to determine whether a change is meaningful. For reference, the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Science's What Works Clearinghouse classifies effect sizes of .25 or above as "substantively important."

Findings from the Quasi-Experimental Study

Outcomes: Graduation

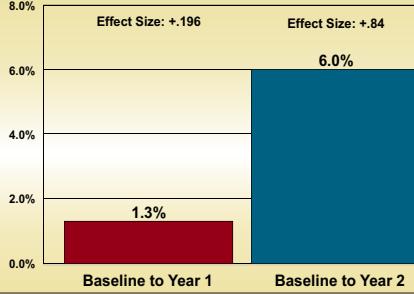
PLC vs. Non-PLC Graduation Rates
(n = 28 districts)



Graduation Rate Findings

The effect size for the net change in graduation rates over two years was strong, 0.843.

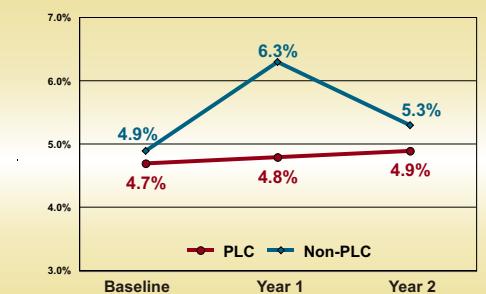
Outcomes: Graduation Rate Net Change from Baseline



- ❖ **Increased Graduation Rates.** PLC districts' graduation rates increased an average of 8.4 percentage points over the two years, compared to just 2.4 percentage points for non-PLC districts. Overall, PLC district graduation rates improved by 6.0 points more than the comparison districts over the 2 years.

Outcomes: Dropout Rate

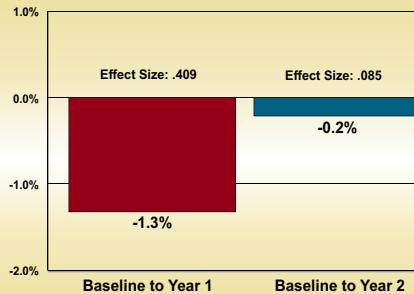
PLC vs. Non-PLC Dropout Rates
(n = 28 districts)



Dropout Rate Findings

The effect size for the net change in dropout rates over the first year was moderate, 0.409.

Outcomes: Dropout Rate Net Change from Baseline



- ❖ **Better Performance in Dropout Rates.** Dropout rates increased substantially for non-PLC districts over 2 years, while PLC districts only experienced only a slight increase in dropout rates (0.2 percentage points). Overall, net change results demonstrated better performance in dropout rates for PLC districts in comparison to non-PLC districts for 1 and 2 years following implementation (-1.3 percentage points year 1 and -0.2 Year 2).

"Georgia PLCs' targeted efforts appear to be having large district effects on student graduation rates and dropout rates - a finding which is surprising given that PLCs only enroll approximately 75 to 80 students within a district. Apparent reasons for this outcome appear to be centered in the PLC's non-traditional, self-directed, student-centered learning environment."

- Report from ICF International