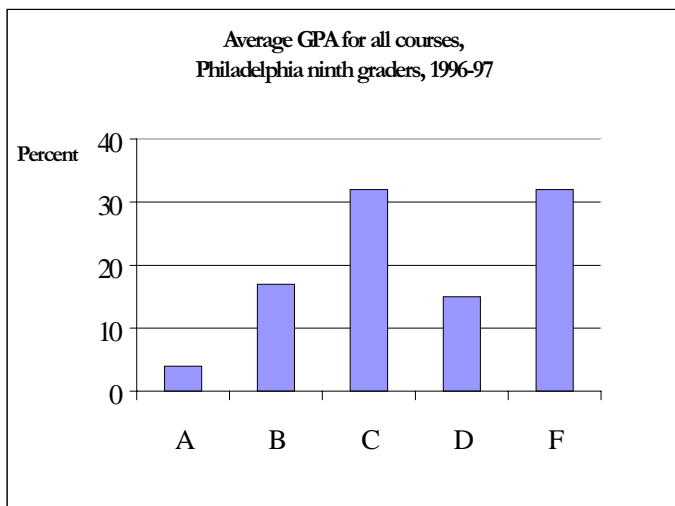




The Talent Development High School: First-year Results of the Ninth Grade Success Academy in Two Philadelphia Schools 1999-2000

THE CHALLENGE: Creating a ninth grade where students succeed

During the first year of high school in the School District of Philadelphia, students' academic performance plummets, their attendance worsens, and failure is pervasive. According to data from the Philadelphia Education Longitudinal Study (PELS), 47 percent of ninth graders earn an **average** of D or F for all their courses. Nearly a third of them fail three or more of their academic courses. In addition, only nine percent of those who repeat the ninth grade graduate four years later. Overall, only 59 percent of entering ninth graders graduate from Philadelphia's public high schools within six years of entry.



Source: Philadelphia Education Longitudinal Study
n=2,792 students (random sample)

The Talent Development initiative has taken on the challenge by...

Creating a self-contained Ninth Grade Success Academy organized around interdisciplinary teams of teachers and students designed to provide incoming ninth graders with a smooth transition into high school:

- ◆ Implementing block (“intensive”) scheduling whereby students take only four courses a semester, each 80-90 minutes long, and stay together all day as a class;
- ◆ Introducing a common core college preparatory curriculum with a “double dose” of English and mathematics in the ninth grade;
- ◆ Requiring the Freshman Seminar, Transition to Advanced Mathematics, and Strategic Reading courses in the fall semester of ninth grade;
- ◆ Providing intensive and subject-specific professional development for teachers and curriculum coaches who give ongoing classroom-based implementation support;
- ◆ Creating self-contained Career Academies for grades 10-12 that provide a core academic curriculum, work-based learning experiences, and career-focused pathway teams of students and teachers;
- ◆ Stressing the use of student-centered teaching strategies such as team and cooperative learning during the longer periods;
- ◆ Creating an alternative after-hours Twilight School for students who have serious attendance or discipline problems or who are coming to the school from incarceration;

- ◆ Using data in an ongoing way to provide feedback to teachers and administrators about the impact of the initiative on student outcomes and school climate;
- ◆ Providing an organizational facilitator who works full-time at two high schools assisting principals and staff with planning, data collection, changes in facilities, and leadership issues;
- ◆ Providing curriculum coaches for on-site professional development and in-class implementation support for teachers in the academic content areas.
- ◆ Providing curriculum materials for first-term courses: Freshman Seminar, Strategic Reading, and Transition to Advanced Mathematics, and during the second term, supplementary materials for the Algebra I and English I courses.

Students noted that their teachers ‘take the time to listen to what we have to say,’ ‘help us whenever we need it,’ ‘make sure we know how to do the work,’ ‘want us to learn,’ and ‘take the time to explain until we understand.’

—RESEARCHERS WILSON & CORBETT

And has started up in 6 of Philadelphia’s 22 neighborhood high schools.

- ◆ **Strawberry Mansion and Edison High Schools** implemented the Ninth Grade Success Academy and Twilight Schools in the 1999-2000 school year and will begin implementation of the upper grade Career Academy pathway learning teams during the 2000-2001 school year.
- ◆ **Overbrook High School** partially implemented the Ninth Grade Success Academy last year. **Overbrook and Simon Gratz High Schools** are implementing the Ninth Grade Success Academy fully during 2000-2001 and are planning the Career Academy pathway teams.

- ◆ **William Penn and Benjamin Franklin High Schools** are undertaking a planning year during 2000-2001. They will implement the entire model in 2001-2002.

The research reported here focuses on the results from the 1999-2000 Ninth Grade Success Academies at Strawberry Mansion and Edison, schools designated as research and development sites.

TALENT DEVELOPMENT HIGH SCHOOL MODEL

The Talent Development comprehensive high school reform model is being designed, implemented, and evaluated by the **Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR)** at **Johns Hopkins University** in Baltimore. The model, aimed at improving large high schools that face serious problems with student attendance, discipline, achievement scores, and dropout rates, consists of specific changes in school organization and management, curriculum and instruction, parent and community involvement, and professional development.

In Philadelphia, the **Philadelphia Education Fund** and the **School District of Philadelphia** are partners in this effort. The \$180,000 average direct cost per school (for curriculum coaches, materials, and training) is funded through state and District-allocated Title I funds, school budgets, the U.S. Department of Education, and private foundations, especially The Pew Charitable Trusts. The Talent Development model is recognized on the list of designs in the federal Obey-Porter Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration legislation.

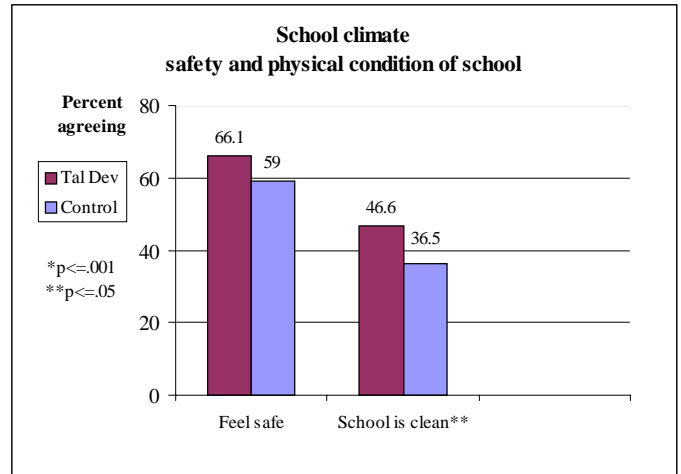
The overall goal of Talent Development is to provide students with the learning opportunities, motivation, and supports they need to overcome poor prior preparation and successfully complete a core college curriculum.

What looked and felt different at the high schools?

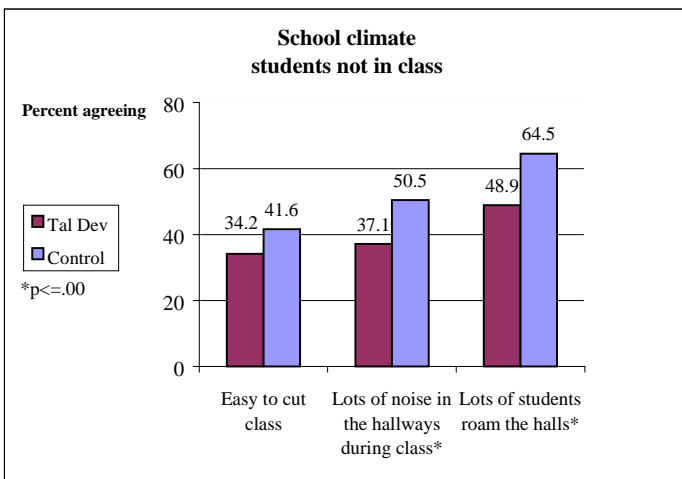
During the first year of implementation, Talent Development focuses intensively on establishing a safe, orderly, and nurturing school climate.

Data from a school climate survey of students at one of the Talent Development schools and its control school indicate that substantial progress was made in this area. Change occurred because:

- ◆ The Ninth Grade Success Academy is physically separated from the rest of the school building either on a separate floor or in a self-contained area of several floors. Ninth graders enter the building through their own entrance with their own ID and security scanner. Student work is displayed in the corridors, elevators, and entrances. The area is kept clean and graffiti-free.
- ◆ The Success Academy has its own principal (an assistant principal) with an office on the premises.
- ◆ Interdisciplinary teams of six teachers instruct a common group of 180 students and share a daily preparation period that can be used as a common planning time. Each team has a Team leader, a respected senior member of the staff, with an extra prep period, who organizes the team process.



Source: Talent Development survey of students in School A and control school, May 2000



Source: Talent Development survey of students in School A and control school, May 2000

- ◆ Students take four 80-90 minute classes per semester, accumulating a potential eight credits in the ninth grade (five are required for promotion). The longer class periods enable teachers to get to know their students better and to provide times for individual assistance. Extended class periods also allow teachers to use instructional strategies such as cooperative learning and projects that engage students' attention. Because students take fewer classes, the number of times they pass between classes is reduced, thereby decreasing the potential for hallway disorder. The completion of the equivalent of year-long courses in a semester also enables students who have been retained to be promoted to the tenth grade in the middle of the school year. At Strawberry Mansion, 63 repeating ninth graders earned enough credits to be promoted to the tenth grade after the first semester.

"Instead of having to rush us, the teacher can give us more time and explain things to us a little longer."

—STUDENT

Did students' behavior improve?

The most striking change in the initial year of implementation was the creation of an orderly climate in the hallways and other common areas of the school.

◆ **Suspensions dropped dramatically.** The number of students suspended (Level I) at Strawberry Mansion declined from 125 in the 1998-99 school year to 37 during 1999-2000. At Edison, the numbers dropped from 1049 to 788 over that same time period.

◆ **The number of arrests decreased** from 62 in 1998-1999 to 16 in 1999-2000 at Strawberry Mansion and from 125 in 1998-1999 to 21 at Edison during 1999-2000, the year Talent Development was implemented.

◆ **Attendance improved.** At Strawberry Mansion, attendance increased from 73 percent in 1998-1999 to 77 percent in 1999-2000. At Edison, the percentage improved from 66 percent to 71 percent.

Did students succeed in class?

Students' attendance improved and their classroom experiences changed.

The Talent Development model aims squarely at changing students' experiences in their core academic courses. A common core academic curriculum is implemented.

Ninth Grade Schedule

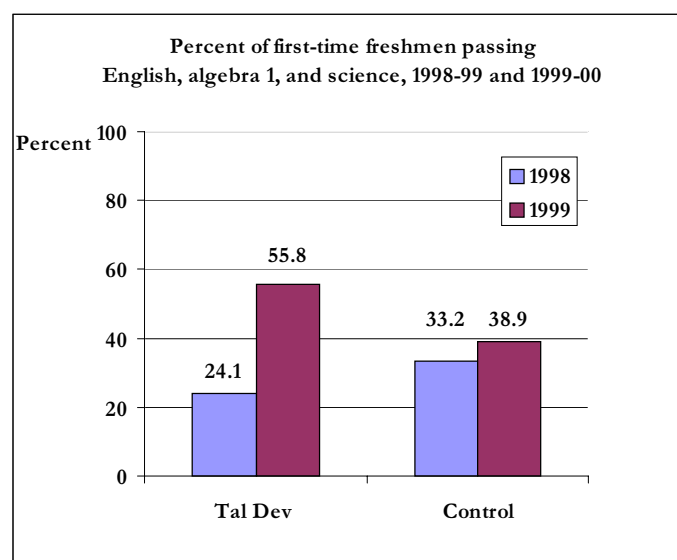
Fall Semester	Spring Semester
Strategic Reading	English I
Transition to Advanced Mathematics	Algebra I
Freshman Seminar	History
Science or elective	Science or elective

So their grades went up...

In both of the Talent Development high schools, students were significantly more likely to pass their core subjects than they were the year before, and more likely to pass than students in the two control schools.

Students attending the after-hours alternative Twilight School also improved their credit accumulation over their previous performance. These are students who had stopped attending high school on a regular basis; many

had severe disciplinary problems, personal difficulties, or were returning from incarceration. Data from the Edison Twilight School show that more than half of the approximately 250 students in this program accumulated more credits in one marking period (they can earn two per period) than they had in the entire previous two years—and many earned more.



Note: Data from the two schools in each category are combined. Does not include summer school.

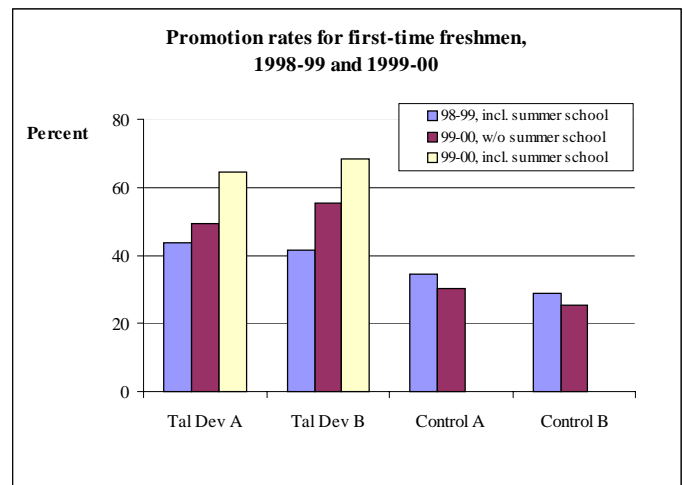
"The organization is better, tighter. They're really trying to address social problems."

—TEACHER

And the percentage of students promoted to the 10th grade increased substantially.

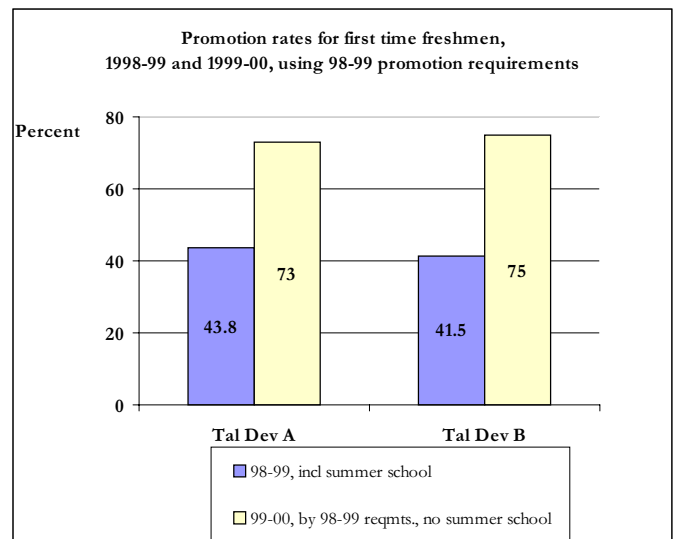
Ninth graders at Talent Development schools were far more likely to be promoted to the tenth grade than the previous year’s cohort, and much more likely to be promoted than students in the comparison high schools.

In 1998-99, freshmen were required to earn four credits in any subject in order to be promoted. Promotion guidelines were revised for the 1999-00 cohort, requiring that they earn five credits, three of which had to be in English, Algebra I, and science.



Even with the more rigorous standards for promotion, one Talent Development school saw its ninth grade promotion rate increase by 47%, the other by 65%.

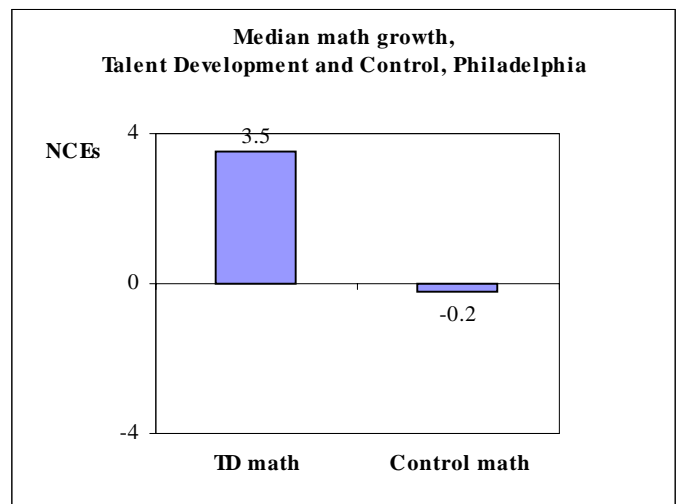
Had the promotion requirements been the same in 1999-00 as they were in 1998-99, the increase would be even more dramatic. By 1998-99 promotion standards, approximately three-quarters of the first-time freshmen would have been promoted in 1999-00 *even before summer school grades were taken into consideration*, compared to about 40 percent the year before.



Students showed gains on standardized achievement tests.

To assess their academic growth, ninth graders in the Talent Development and control schools were given an abbreviated form of the Stanford-9 Achievement Test (SAT-9) during April 2000. Their scores were compared to their results on the eighth grade SAT-9.

Math test scores in the two Talent Development high schools rose a median of 3.5 normal curve equivalents (NCEs) while the two control schools declined by a median of 0.2 NCEs. This is a significant and substantial gain, and indicates that students in the Talent Development schools were catching up with their peers nationally, while the students at the control schools were not. The gains in the Talent Development schools, moreover, were widespread across all classrooms.



Substantial gains in reading comprehension were not achieved during the first year of implementation. However, the median student in the Talent Development schools had a small increase in measured reading ability compared to a significant decline in the control schools. In addition, thirty-three percent of students in the Talent Development schools gained ground against national norms. On average, however, students in the Talent Development schools experienced a decline relative to national norms but at a lesser rate than students in the control schools (an average 4.1 NCE decline in TD schools versus 7.7 in the control schools).

Unlike the mathematics courses, the Strategic Reading course was an entirely new subject area at the high schools and the materials were still being developed. Five of the 11 ninth grade English teachers were also in their first year of teaching, and three others were just entering their second

year. In addition, Strategic Reading teachers did not receive the recommended level of professional development. These facts may explain why average test scores did not rise significantly as they have in other Talent Development High Schools. The materials, pedagogical strategies, and teacher training and support are substantially expanded for the 2000-2001 school year.

Reading Gains at TDHS and Control Schools

	Change in Median Grade Equivalent	Percent of Students with NCE Gain	Median NCE Change
TDHS	.10	33	-4.1
Control	-.95	29	-7.7

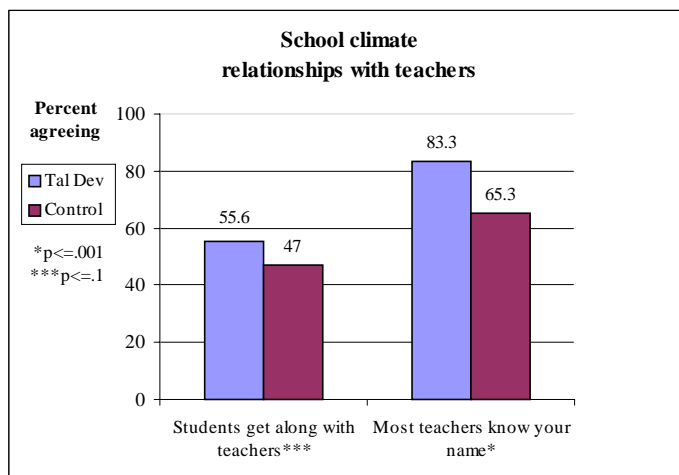
Did students feel more supported and show more interest in learning?

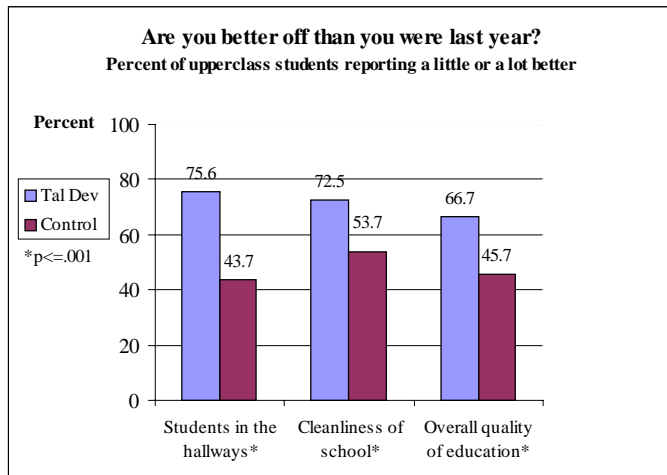
Remarkably, when researchers Dick Corbett and Bruce Wilson interviewed 160 of the ninth and tenth grade students at the two high schools in the spring of 2000, the students spoke with one voice.

They claimed that the schools—from the ways teachers worked with them to the ways the schools were organized—were truly learning centered. **For example, 85 percent of the students said that their Success Academy teachers were as helpful or more helpful than their middle school teachers.** And they expressed great relief to discover a calm, friendly environment in place of the hostile and stark school depicted in rumors. Data from a schoolwide climate survey administered by Talent Development researchers in one of the schools in May 2000 showed the same pattern.

The quality of the students' relationships with teachers benefitted tremendously from the extended-class periods that are a hallmark of the Success Academies. **Three fourths of the students who were interviewed identified the four-class schedule as a major reason**

why teachers were able to work closely with them. The extra time, they reported, afforded teachers more opportunities to answer questions and check for understanding than was the case with shorter classes.





Talent Development’s required Freshman Seminar course was also praised by students: three fourths indicated that the class played an important role in helping them to adjust to high school.

The influence of Talent Development spread beyond the ninth grade. The four-block schedule was put in place at all grade levels as were additional security and physical improvements.

Evidence from the interview data and from a school-wide climate survey administered by Johns Hopkins researchers showed that the impact was immediately noticeable to the older students. They reiterated the ninth graders’ appreciation of the advantages of the extended-class periods and spoke with pride about the improved school climate.

What did teachers think about the Talent Development High School model?

Evaluators from Research for Action, an independent research firm, interviewed the ninth grade teachers at the two high schools who were teaching the Talent Development courses (Strategic Reading, Transition to Advanced Mathematics, Freshman Seminar) during the fall and spring of the 1999-2000 school year. They also interviewed school administrators and observed some of the teachers’ team meetings. According to their data:

Most teachers spoke positively about...

- ◆ the improved school climate;
- ◆ the chance to meet regularly in common planning times with other teachers in their inter-disciplinary teams;
- ◆ the fact that students choose Career Academies in ninth grade rather than in eighth grade;
- ◆ the option of Twilight School for disruptive pupils;
- ◆ the Freshman Seminar curriculum.

Some teachers were encouraged by...

- ◆ achievement gains of many of their students;
- ◆ students’ use of study skills they had learned in the Freshman Seminar;

- ◆ the assistance of the Curriculum Coaches;
- ◆ the support provided by the Team Leader, a new role created by Talent Development.

Some teachers were concerned about...

- ◆ the need for a stronger implementation of Twilight School at one of the schools;
- ◆ continuing problems with student discipline in the classroom;
- ◆ the difficulty of teaching heterogeneous ability groups of students;
- ◆ the need for more bilingual/bicultural components;
- ◆ implementing group work effectively.

And many recommended...

- ◆ more fully developed first-term courses;
- ◆ more resources and materials to implement teaching and learning activities;
- ◆ more support with discipline;
- ◆ more in-class time for the Curriculum Coaches.

For this coming year, Talent Development has improved and intensified the effort by...

- ◆ adding additional coaches to fully support each Talent Development High School;
- ◆ providing monthly professional development sessions for graduate course credit or pay;
- ◆ revising the Strategic Reading, Transition to Advanced Mathematics, and Freshman Seminar courses based on feedback from teachers;
- ◆ supporting teachers with a variety of classroom discipline strategies;
- ◆ testing all entering ninth graders in math (CTBS) and reading (Gates-MacGinitie);
- ◆ providing additional strategies and supports for repeating ninth graders;
- ◆ providing additional strategies and supports for the Twilight School program.

About This Report...

Five research groups contributed to this report on the impact of Talent Development during the 1999-2000 school year: Ruth Curran Neild, Associate Research Scientist at Johns Hopkins University, and William Morrison, Director of the Philadelphia Talent Development High School initiative for Johns Hopkins University on assignment to the Philadelphia Education Fund, oversaw the collection and analysis of data on student outcomes and school climate measures. Loretta Westler at the Office of Accountability and Assessment of the School District of Philadelphia compiled data on student grades. Evaluators at Research for Action—Rebecca Reumann-Moore, Rachel Martin, Marcine Pickron-Davis, and Hitomi Yoshida—conducted the study of teacher attitudes. Bruce Wilson and H. Dickson Corbett, independent researchers, reported on students' assessments of the Talent Development initiative through individual interviews with 160 students in the two schools.

Betsey Useem, Director of Research and Evaluation at the Philadelphia Education Fund, compiled this synthesis of findings from the different research groups.

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Talent Development High Schools Research and Development Sites

Edison-Fareira High School

Principal: Dr. Jose Lebrón
Success Academy Principal: Ken Lerner
215-324-9440

Strawberry Mansion Middle/High School

Principal: Charles Highsmith
Success Academy Principal: Marshall Album
215-684-5089

For information on the initiative, contact:

William Morrison

Philadelphia Talent Development High Schools
Philadelphia Education Fund
7 Ben Franklin Parkway, Suite 700
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215-665-1400 x 3459
www.philaedfund.org/programs

James McPartland

Talent Development High Schools
Center for Research on the Education of
Students Placed At Risk
Johns Hopkins University
3003 N. Charles Street, Suite 200
Baltimore, MD 21218
410-516-8800