

2019

# Outcomes of the Open Doors Youth Reengagement Program



## ABOUT THE ERDC

The research presented here uses data from the Education Research and Data Center, located in the Washington Office of Financial Management. ERDC works with partner agencies to conduct powerful analyses of learning that can help inform the decisionmaking of Washington legislators, parents, and education providers. ERDC's data system is a statewide longitudinal data system that includes de-identified data about people's preschool, educational and workforce experiences.

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## Introduction

One of the three broad Building Bridges (RCW 28A.175.075) recommendations issued in 2007 tasked the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction with creating a statewide system to reengage older, credit-deficient youth who had dropped out or who had no chance to graduate from high school on time. It was the Legislature's intent to encourage partnerships among school districts, community and technical colleges and community-based organizations to provide appropriate instruction and services that enable students to become a productive members of their community.

Open Doors youth reengagement programs and schools were developed to provide multiple pathways to demonstrate career and college readiness. Students can earn their GED and participate in postsecondary or work readiness education (GED plus), earn a high school diploma or earn college credits/certificates or a two-year degree.

Open Doors addresses the needs of students who were disproportionately unsuccessful in traditional K-12 systems by allowing them to participate in an outcome-based education model that does not rely on seat time for funding and allows multiple pathways for success. It provides educational opportunities to any student between 16 and 21 years of age who is credit deficient and to students who have dropped out of the K-12 education system. Open Doors partners with a range of education service providers (community and technical colleges, educational service districts, community-based organizations, skills centers, workforce development councils, Job Corps, for-profit online providers and even a prison) to provide access to high school diplomas, high school equivalency, college credits, associate degrees, certificate completion and job training.

### Program growth

The growth of Open Doors was exponential over the first five years. After enabling legislation passed in 2010, the first two programs opened in the **2011–12** school year. No annual data was collected on these students as they did not attend school the majority of the school year.

In the **2012–13** school year, the first full cohort of students attended in three types of reengagement programming. ESD 113 started a consortium model with 17 school districts to provide GED preparation. I-Grad in the Kent School District served students in a storefront facility and partnered with Green River Community College to provide GED preparation, high school completion and college coursework. Lake Washington Technical Institute served students on the Tech Institute campus with high school completion and college coursework. Annual data was gathered on an aggregate level by each program and submitted to OSPI. This remained the practice until 2015–16.

In the **2013–14** school year, the programs grew, the consortium model expanded and multiple districts started their own programs. For students enrolled in Open Doors, reporting was inconsistent as we learned about the reporting hurdles faced by these

nontraditional programs and schools. The challenges to collecting complete data were many: Some districts were assigned multiple school codes, some had none, some were operating under the belief that if students were concentrating on a GED or work preparedness they did not need to have them in their student information systems and some believed that if a college was providing the educational services they would be captured in that system. Aggregate data was again collected, but did not have fidelity. Compliance monitoring began during the 2013–14 school year this year, and best practices for data collection and reporting were shared among providers.

During the 2014–15 school year, Open Doors had grown to 68 school districts. The process of working with districts to improve data collection and reporting continued, but the student-level data was still inadequate in providing an unbiased cohort of students as the basis for a longitudinal outcome study. However, programs continued to grow and districts that were using early warning intervention systems began to look deeper at data on why students were leaving school and to create multiple and unique pathways to reengage them.

By the 2015–16 school year, Open Doors had grown to 93 school districts, serving a monthly average of more than 4,000 students. All districts were required to identify Open Doors students in their student information systems, and subsequently report them to the state’s student-data collection system, CEDARS. Every year since then, the data collection system has improved and guidance to the field has resulted in better quality student-level data.

## About the cohort

This analysis follows a cohort of students ( $n = 7,440$ ) who participated in one or more Open Doors reengagement programs on or after Sept. 1, 2015, during the 2015–16 academic year. It describes the participants in the reengagement program, provides an overview of their high school experience and looks at their postsecondary and workforce outcomes.

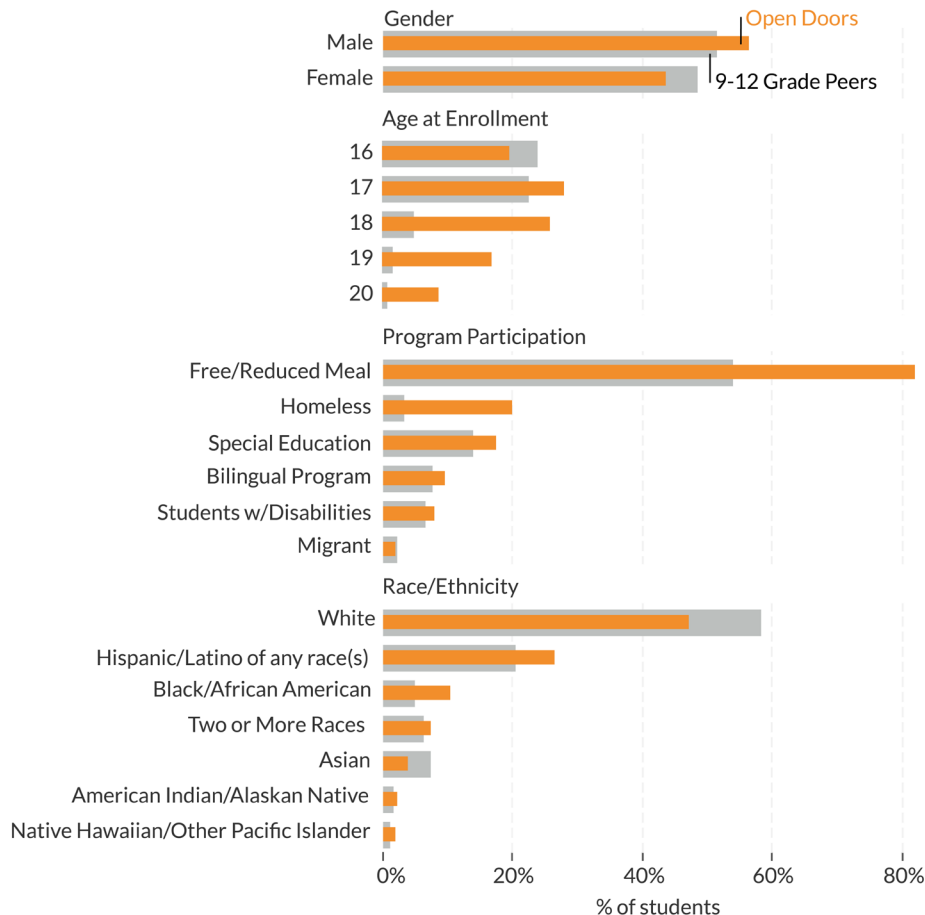
To explore the demographics of participants in the Open Doors program, participants were compared with every student enrolled in grades nine through 12 during that same academic year, or 352,601 high school peers. This is because students who were enrolled in the Open Doors program must be age 16 or older at the start of the 2015–16 school year, and were potentially enrolled in grades nine through 12.<sup>1</sup>

Participants were more likely to be male than their high school peers and represented a higher-aged cohort than their high school peers. They were also disproportionately more likely (when compared with their high school peers) to be black/African American or Hispanic/Latino and disproportionately less likely to be Asian or white. They were also more likely to be

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1 It is expected that as the program and the data continue to mature, we will eventually be able use each student’s graduation requirement year to yield more commensurable demographic comparisons with students with a similar graduation requirement year. For example, participants with an expected graduation year of 2017 would be compared with high school peers of similar demographics and experiences with the same expected graduation year.

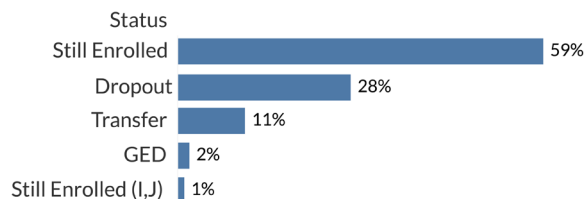
Figure 1. Demographics of main cohort (see also Table A1)



from a lower-income group, but less likely to have participated in special education.

Most participants (59 percent) in the Open Doors program were still enrolled in high school when they were enrolled in the reengagement program, with a substantial minority already coded as having dropped out of high school. It is important to note that this represents the status of the student at the time of enrollment in the reengagement program, not their final outcome. This indicates that Open Doors is successfully targeting students before they have left high school as well as engaging students who have already left.

Figure 2. Status at enrollment in Open Doors (see also Table A2)

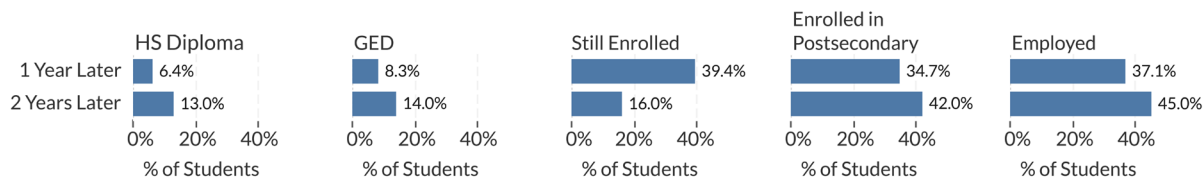


## Key Outcomes

### Most participants were either employed or enrolled in a postsecondary institution two years later.

While only some Open Doors participants successfully completed their high school diploma within two years of their enrollment, most participants were either employed or enrolled in a postsecondary institution by the end of the second year.

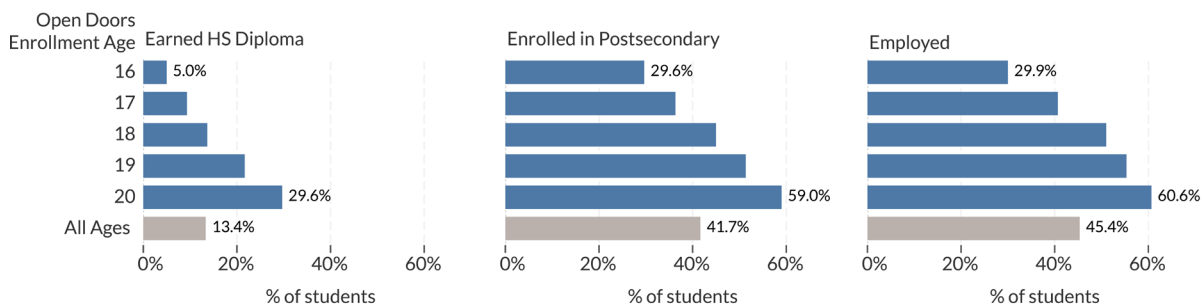
Figure 3. Outcomes 1-2 years later (see also Table A3)



### Age is a predictor of outcomes – students who were older during their participation in Open Doors were more likely to be enrolled in postsecondary education or employed.

It is important to note that the age of the participant is a strong predictor of their outcome. The older a student is when they first enrolled in Open Doors, the more likely they are to have earned a diploma, be enrolled in higher education or be employed. This suggests that many who enrolled in the program at a younger age may yet complete their diploma, enroll in a postsecondary institution or find employment as more time passes.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 4. Outcomes 2 years later by age at enrollment (see also Table A4)

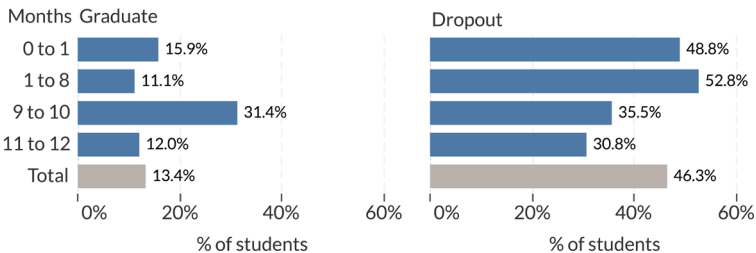


2 As the program and data mature, we will be able to follow the outcomes of students by graduation requirement year, which will provide further clarify this ambiguity in the outcomes.

**Students who spent more time in Open Doors were less likely to drop out.**

It is also useful to know that “dosage” (i.e., amount of time enrolled in the Open Doors program) makes a difference in student outcomes. For example, students who were involved for nine to 10 months in the reengagement program were far more likely to graduate from high school. Students who participated for 11 to 12 months were significantly less likely to drop out than students who spend less time in the reengagement program. As the data matures over time, we will be more equipped to control for potential covariates (e.g., were those who participated for fewer months at greater risk to begin with, or can improved outcomes be attributed to participation in Open Doors?).

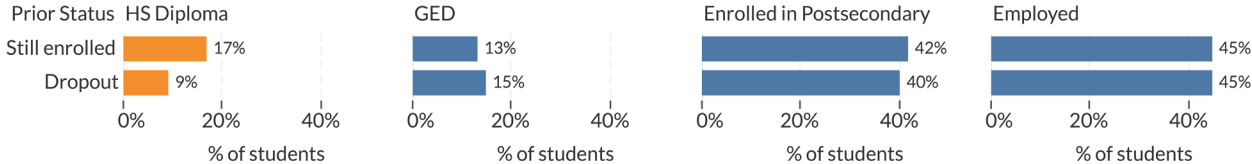
Figure 5. Outcomes 2 years later by months enrolled (see also Table A5)



**Students who participated in Open Doors prior to dropping out had higher graduation rates.**

When we look at the two-year outcomes of students who had dropped out prior to participating in the reengagement program and compare them with the outcomes of students who enrolled prior to dropping out, we can see that those who enrolled prior to dropping out were nearly twice as likely to complete a high school diploma. However, a number of the reengaged dropouts still completed their high school diploma, and other outcomes are comparable (despite greater risk factors).

Figure 6. Outcomes 2 years later by status prior to enrollment (see also Table A6)



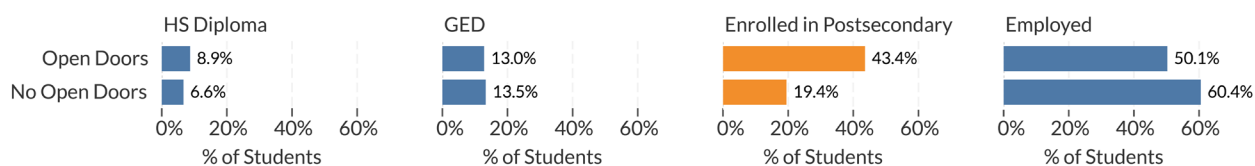
## An additional analysis

Without a commensurable comparison group, it is difficult to interpret the outcomes above. To supplement that analysis, an additional analysis was conducted, this time with a comparison group. The cohort analyzed consisted of those who (1) had a graduation requirement year of 2015 (which means they were expected to graduate in 2015), and (2) dropped out of high school before Sept. 1, 2015 (i.e., they did not graduate as expected). Of these students, some were enrolled in Open Doors (404 students) and some were not (8,331 students). We should note that these two groups had similar demographics (see demographic charts in Table A8).

### Dropouts who participated in Open Doors enrolled in postsecondary institutions at twice the rate of dropouts who did not.

Students with a graduation requirement year of 2015 who dropped out and then enrolled in Open Doors in 2015 had higher high school graduation rates than those who did not enroll in Open Doors. In addition, 43 percent of those who enrolled in Open Doors were enrolled in a postsecondary institution two years later, while only 19.4 percent of those who did not enroll in Open Doors were so enrolled. This means that dropouts who participated in Open Doors were more than twice as likely to enroll in a postsecondary institution, whether or not they received a high school diploma.

Figure 7. Outcomes 2 years later for GRY 2015 dropout cohort (see also Table A7)



## Future analysis

Moving forward, we propose that cohorts and their comparison groups be defined by graduation requirement year and that outcomes of Open Doors participants be compared with high school peers with a similar graduation requirement year, as with the final analysis above. It should be noted that the elevated enrollment rates seen in the final analysis above cannot be conclusively tied to Open Doors enrollment: While the demographic characteristics of these two groups were similar, there may yet be differences between them beyond their participation in Open Doors. Therefore, we propose that measures be taken to control for confounding factors to better determine the effect of program participation on student outcomes. For example, it may be prudent to create a comparison group using propensity scoring matching on variables such as age, income status, race/ethnicity, gender and credits earned.



## Appendix A

Table A1. Demographics of Main Cohort

	Open Doors	9-12 grade
Number enrolled	7,440	352,601
Age at enrollment		
16	20.4%	24.0%
17	28.1%	22.6%
18	25.8%	5.0%
19	17.0%	1.5%
20	8.7%	0.8%
Gender		
Female	43.7%	48.37%
Male	56.3%	51.63%
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2.2%	1.6%
Asian	3.9%	7.4%
Black/African American	10.4%	4.8%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	26.4%	20.4%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	1.8%	1.0%
Two or More Races	7.3%	6.4%
White	47.1%	58.4%
Programs		
Free/Reduced Price Meal Status	82.0%	53.9%
Is Bilingual Program	9.5%	7.6%
Is Special Ed	17.5%	14.0%
Is Title I Migrant	2.0%	2.2%
Is 504	7.8%	6.5%
Homeless 2016	4.0%	3.3%

Table A2. Status at Enrollment in Open Doors

Dropout	28%
Still Enrolled	59%
Still Enrolled (I,J)	1%
GED	2%
Transfer	11%

Table A3. Outcomes 1-2 Years Later

	Outcomes 1 year later	Outcomes 2 years later
HS Diploma	6%	13%
GED	8%	14%
PS Enrolled	35%	42%
Still Enrolled	39%	16%
Employed	37%	45%

Table A4. Outcomes 2 Years Later by Age at Enrollment

Age at enrollment in Open Doors	Outcomes 2 years later		
	HS Diploma	PS Enrolled	Employed
16	5.0%	29.6%	29.9%
17	9.3%	36.2%	40.7%
18	13.5%	45.1%	51.1%
19	21.6%	51.4%	55.2%
20	29.6%	59.0%	60.6%
Total	13.4%	41.7%	45.4%

Table A5. Outcomes 2 Years Later by Months Enrolled

Months enrolled in Open Doors	Outcomes 2 years later	
	Dropout	Graduate
0	48.82%	15.91%
1-8	52.75%	11.05%
9-10	35.52%	31.40%
11-12	30.78%	12.04%
Total	46.28%	13.36%

Table A6. Outcomes 2 Years Later by Status Prior to Enrollment

Status prior to enrollment in Open Doors	Outcomes 2 years later			
	HS Diploma	GED	PS Enrolled	Employed
Still enrolled	17%	13%	42%	45%
Dropout	9%	15%	40%	45%

Table A7. Outcomes 2 Years Later for GRY 2015 Dropout Cohort

	HS Diploma	GED	PS Enrolled	Employed
Open Doors	8.9%	13.0%	43.4%	50.1%
No Open Doors	6.6%	13.5%	19.4%	60.4%

Table A8. Demographics of the GRY 2015 Dropout Cohort

	GRY 2015 Dropouts Who Did Not Enroll in Open Doors	GRY 2015 Dropouts Who Enrolled in Open Doors
Gender		
Female	41%	43%
Male	59%	57%
Race/ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaska Native	3%	2%
Asian	3%	5%
Black or African American	6%	11%
Hispanic or Latino	25%	28%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1%	2%
Multiracial	5%	7%
White	56%	46%
Program participation (ever)		
FRPL	77%	81%
Bilingual	11%	10%
Special Education	18%	15%
Title I Migrant	5%	3%
Section 504	5%	8%
Homeless	18%	21%



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