

2018-19 Evaluation of Transition Services

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EA19-613-4

At-a-Glance¹

The Psychological and Social Services (PSS) Department served students with significant social, emotional, or academic difficulties. In 2018-19, the Transition Services² department, part of PSS, provided licensed psychologists and social workers to the Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) campuses to assist students with the successful transition to their home campuses from the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP), the Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP), psychiatric hospital stays, and mental health related homebound placements. Transition Services received \$315,698 in Title I funds for the 2018-19 school year for personnel costs, which was an increase from \$186,441 in 2017-18.

The purpose of this evaluation was to explore program implementation fidelity, to examine expected outcomes as outlined in program documents, and to summarize staff member program perceptions. PSS staff members provided identification numbers for served students to the evaluator. The evaluator also collected program-related implementation data using interviews and an online survey of PSS staff members. Because PSS staff members were unable to flag students returning from JJAEP, psychiatric hospitals, and other treatment facilities, data for these students were not reported. Student data provided were limited to students released from the DAEP.

What was the campus re-entry process?

When students were released from off-campus facilities (DAEP, the JJAEP, psychiatric hospitals, and mental health related homebound placements) and re-enrolled at their home campuses, assigned PSS staff members were notified by campus representatives, and a case review of referral information was initiated to determine if an immediate need for Tier III interventions/strategies was evident. These strategies could include individual or family counseling, referral to in-District or out-of-District resources, assistance with negotiating social support services, informal evaluation, or needs assessment specific to the student. Tier III interventions/strategies only were provided with signed parental consent. If no determination of immediate need was necessary, Tier II interventions/strategies were implemented. Tier II interventions/strategies could include monitoring attendance, academic progress, and discipline referrals.

The services provided to transition students were documented and monitored by a campus-based multi-disciplinary screening committee. Clinicians, psychologists, and social workers assisted with coordinating service delivery of mental health and social services needs to students in a timely manner.

The purpose of transition support in 2018-19 was to improve school achievement and attendance by assisting students to 1) remain on campus and avoid placement in a more restrictive school or community venue, 2) improve behavior and school functioning, and 3) reduce Juvenile Justice involvement.

What were the characteristics of students served?

In 2018-19, 1,952 students committed offenses that led to placement in the DAEP (Table 1). Some (under 10%) of these students committed multiple offenses. Students attended the DAEP until completing the time (days) associated with the severity of the offense committed (range: 10 days to 1 year). Slightly less than two thirds (63%) of the offenders were Hispanic (increase from 55% in 2017-18); 66 percent were male (the same as in 2017-18); and about 36 percent were English Learners (increase from 29% in 2017-18). Rates of African American Students were higher than district rates (22%), and rates of Hispanic students were lower than the district (70%). In addition, offenses committed by students receiving special education services (11%) decreased in 2018-19 compared to 2017-18 (13%).

Table 1: 2018-19 Characteristics of Students with DAEP Placement (N=1,952)

	<i>n</i>	%
Race/Ethnicity		
Hispanic	1,227	62.9
African American	650	33.3
White	43	2.2
Other	32	1.6
Sex		
Male	1,289	66.0
Female	663	34.0
Special Student Groups		
English Learner	705	36.1
Special Education	223	11.4

Source: District demographic file dated May 28, 2019.

Note: DAEP = Disciplinary Alternative Education Program.

¹ Portions of this report were adapted from Rincon (2018).

² Program staff members call the program Re-entry Services.

Discipline Referrals

As shown in Table 2, total offenses resulting in DAEP placement in 2018-19 increased 163 (8.3%) from 2017-18 to a total of 2,133 offenses. In both years, drug offenses were the most common reason for referral.

Table 2: 2017-18 and 2018-19 Offenses Leading to DAEP Placement

Offense	2017-18 (N=1,970)		2018-19 (N=2,133)	
	n	%	n	%
Drugs (non-felony)	1,109	56.3	1,364	63.9
Assault (Class C personnel)	143	7.3	149	7.0
Major Disruptive Behavior	93	4.7	107	5.0
Repetitive Level I Offenses	178	9.0	94	4.4
Assault (Class A)	64	3.2	91	4.3
Alcohol (non-felony)	75	3.8	62	2.9
Public Lewdness	37	1.9	56	2.6
Fighting	59	3.0	49	2.3
Profanity/obscene gesture	54	2.7	40	1.9
Assault (Class C student)	64	3.2	30	1.4
Bullying	23	1.2	21	1.0
Felony Conduct (NE)	26	1.3	18	0.8
Other	45	2.3	52	2.4

Source: District discipline data files dated July 19, 2018 (2017-18) and July 18, 2019 (2018-19).

Note: Students may have committed multiple offenses. DAEP = Disciplinary Alternative Education Program. "Other" includes all offenses with fewer than 10 referrals. Percentages do not sum to 100 because of rounding.

What were the program challenges?

In 2018-19, its third year, the transition services program continued to struggle with tracking students after release from the DAEP through re-enrolling at their home campuses. This challenge led to difficulty for PSS when they tried to reach out to students to provide transition services. Other challenges faced by the program included:

- convincing parents to sign the PSS consent form;
- students taking extended time (days/weeks) to re-enroll at home campuses;
- students not returning to home campuses (i.e., when parents did not want children to return to the same environment);
- campus staff members neglecting to notify PSS staff members of student re-enrollment on their campuses;
- PSS staff members spending excessive time locating transition students after release from the DAEP; and
- locating/identifying re-enrolled students who were released from psychiatric hospitals to provide needed support (e.g., 504 or special education placement, Youth and Family Center services).

How did PSS respond to challenges?

The DAEP clinician provided a list of students released from the DAEP periodically to PSS staff members at the home campuses where these students were expected to re-enroll. The PSS worked with the Truancy Department and the Red Bird Family Youth Center in 2018-19 to help reach and track transition students to

address drug- and alcohol-related issues and other services. The department also worked with each campus regarding attendance and establishing a system for notifying staff members of the departure and arrival of students.

PSS staff members also provided services to parents by identifying inappropriate student behaviors that parents and family members should not ignore or overlook and by communicating the services available to help with these behaviors (with written consent). An important function of PSS was building relationships with parents/guardians to educate and encourage participation in services available to their children.

The PSS also met with and formed relationships with mental health hospitals in the area; however, release procedures for each institution differed. Also, compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) was challenging because of the privacy protections they provided for student medical and education records that could provide insight into needed services for transitioning students. To address this challenge, PSS built relationships with campus nurses, whose first-line knowledge of student medical issues would equip them to alert PSS staff when a student needed services.

What were the perceptions of staff members?

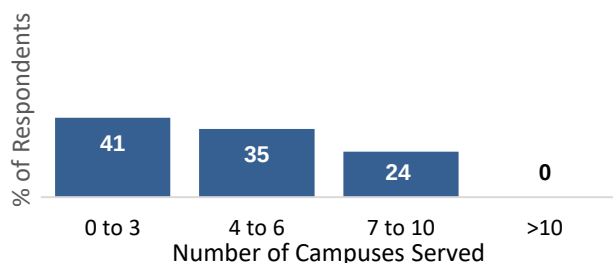
The evaluator developed a survey in collaboration with the program manager that was administered in January and February 2019 to 42 PSS staff members, including clinicians, psychologists, social workers and interns. These data were used to summarize perceptions of program implementation and suggestions for improvement of the Transition Services program.

A total of 38 staff members responded to the survey (91%). Respondents included social workers (39%), psychologists (48%), clinicians (6%), and interns (8%). Overall, less than half of the respondents (45%) agreed or strongly agreed that the Transition Services program was effective during the 2018-19 school year. In other words, over half of respondents did not feel the program was effective in 2018-19.

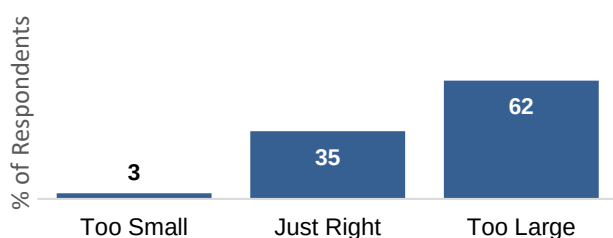
As shown in Figure 1, the greatest percentage of respondents served between zero and three campuses (41%). Respondents were most likely to indicate their caseloads were too large (62%), and most (88%) met with transition students one to three times per month. In addition, 69 percent of respondents served one to 25 transition students in 2018-19.

Figure 1: 2018-19 Transition Services Staff Members Perception Survey Responses (N = 38)

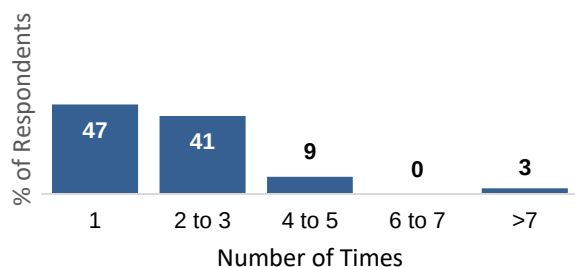
To how many campuses did you provide transition services during the 2018-19 school year?



The size of my caseload for the 2018-19 school year was...



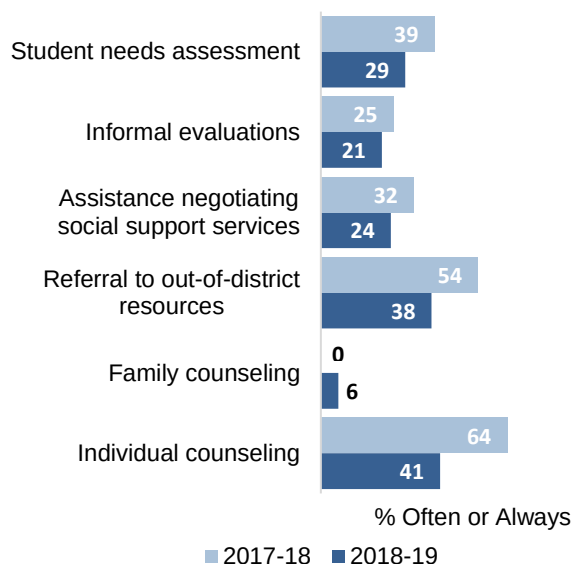
On average, how many times did you meet with the transition students in your caseload per month in 2018-19?



Source: 2018-19 Transition Services Survey.

As shown in Figure 2, the highest percentage of 2018-19 survey respondents indicated they frequently (often or always) provided individual counseling (41%) and referral to out-of-district resources (38%). The lowest percentage of respondents indicated they frequently provided family counseling services (6%). The rates of 2018-19 respondents who frequently provided most services decreased from 2017-18, especially for individual counseling (23 percentage point decrease).

Figure 2: 2017-18 and 2018-19 Transition Services Staff Member Survey Responses About Services Provided

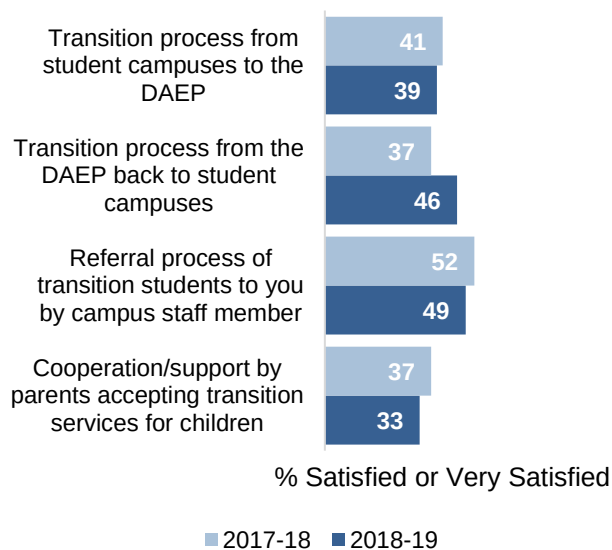


Source: 2017-18 and 2018-19 Transition Services Surveys.

Note: N (2017-18) = 29. N (2018-19) = 38.

As shown in Figure 3, the highest percentage of 2018-19 staff member respondents indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the referral process by campuses (49%), and the lowest percentage expressed satisfaction with cooperation and support from parents for transition services (33%). The greatest change from 2017-18 was a nine-percentage point increase in staff member satisfaction with the transition process from the DAEP back to student campuses, although the rate of satisfied respondents remained under 50 percent for all processes queried.

Figure 3: 2017-18 and 2018-19 Transition Services Staff Member Perception Survey - Implementation Satisfaction



Source: 2017-18 and 2018-19 Transition Services Surveys.

Note: DAEP = Disciplinary Alternative Education Program.
N (2017-18) = 29. N (2018-19) = 38.

In response to open-ended questions, respondents ($n=30$; 79% of respondents) expressed numerous barriers they encountered concerning implementation of the Transition Services program during the 2018-19 school year. Some of the more common barriers mentioned included the following:

- Difficulty locating students transferring to and from their home campuses and the DAEP ($n=15$).
- Lack of information on student offenses prior to DAEP placement ($n=5$).
- Poor coordination between parents and campuses, particularly when students return to home campuses ($n=6$).

Respondents ($N=31$) also provided suggestions for improving the Transition Services program. Some of the more common suggestions included the following:

- Create a real-time tracking system ($n=10$).
- Improve communication between campuses and Transition Services program staff members to learn the reasons for referral ($n=6$).
- Convince more parents to consent to needed treatments. ($n=8$).

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered for the Transition Services Program.

- **Consider establishing an administrative transfer system for students referred to the DAEP and**

back to their home campuses. This procedure would reduce the difficulty locating students and improve coordination between parents and campuses. Also, it would address the problem of locating students transferring from and to their home campuses. The administrative procedure could be coordinated with transportation services. At the end of DAEP referral, the administrative transfer could be reversed to return students to their home campuses.

- **Create a centralized referral system to assign students to Transition Services or to other pertinent services.** This system could contribute to providing proper information to staff members prior to DAEP placement.

Reference

Rincon, R. (2018). 2017-18 Evaluation of Transition Services. Dallas, TX: Dallas Independent School District.

An electronic version of this report can be found at www.dallasisd.org/Page/888. For more information, please contact Program Evaluation at evaluation@dallasisd.org.

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