

Challenge Success Evaluation Report: Executive Summary

This report presents results from a three-year evaluation. Data were collected from 10 schools during three years (2011-2014) of participation in Challenge Success, 8 schools over two years (2012-2014) of participation in Challenge Success, and 9 schools during their first year (2013-2014). We also present comparison data from two schools that have taken the Challenge Success survey at two different points in time across multiple years, and two schools that have taken the survey three times. Thus, the data that comprise this report come from 30 schoolsⁱ that serve a collected student body of more than 28,500 students.

The addition of Wave 2 and Wave 3 schools allows us to confirm conclusions from the first year report as well as expand on them. Additionally, data from the subsequent cohorts and multi-year comparison schools give us insight into how the school change process progresses over time, and how it affects students. Thus, we continue our focus on implementation-level program outcomes, and deepen our investigation of student-level changes over multiple years of Challenge Success participation.

Findings

Looking across all 27 schools in their first year with Challenge Success, we confirm that schools spend much of the first year raising awareness of the problem and educating parents, faculty, and students about the main messages of Challenge Success. For instance, schools use assemblies, meetings, newsletters, events, and clubs to educate about the signs of stress and positive coping strategies to increase well-being. We also find that all schools in their first year of the program engaged in at least one policy and practice change, such as modifying school schedules or adding an advisory program.

We find that in the second and third years with Challenge Success, schools focus more on making policy and practice changes and less on broadening awareness across the school community than in the first year. For instance, many schools altered student schedules to incorporate late start times, longer passing periods between classes, or modified block schedules in the second year. The second year also saw the highest rate of implementing a test or exam calendar, and the third year saw the highest rate of modifying college counseling practices. These findings suggest that certain policy changes, particularly those requiring active participation from faculty, may be better accomplished after an initial period of sharing information and raising awareness. Results suggest that schools would benefit from more guidance in implementing project-based learning. Overall, we find that Year 2 and Year 3 changes often come from momentum generated during the first year, and in many cases are driven by results of the Stanford Survey of Adolescent School Experiences (the student survey implemented by Challenge Success research staff). Across our three Waves of school cohorts, we see a trend of schools increasingly participating in the survey process, which has encouraging implications for policy changes at these schools.

In addition to informing changes at the school level, survey data also provides insight into student-level outcomes over time. In this report, we compare student outcomes at two schools from their first year in Challenge Success to the same outcomes in a subsequent year. Furthermore, we compare outcomes between two schools that have taken the survey three times. Results from these analyses demonstrate many significant improvements, such as increased academic engagement and teacher support, and decreased student stress about school. Our findings suggest that taking the student survey and making data-driven decisions may be particularly effective for Challenge Success schools.

Implications

Our conclusions from this evaluation will continue to guide program improvements and help schools make meaningful, site-specific changes that are informed by data and best practices.

ⁱ One of the three schools used in the survey comparison data was a Wave 1 school.