

TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT NOTICE	NO. 46-10
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TO: STATE WORKFORCE AGENCIES
STATE WORKFORCE LIAISONS

FROM: JANE OATES
Assistant Secretary *Jane Oates*

SUBJECT: Release and Availability of two Employment and Training Administration (ETA) Occasional Papers relating to Strategies for Persistently Dangerous Schools

1. Purpose. To announce the release and availability of two ETA Occasional Papers on Mentoring, Educational, and Employment Strategies to Improve Academic, Social and Career Pathway Outcomes in Persistently Dangerous Schools prepared by Social Policy Research Associates, Inc. (SPRA).

2. Background. In 2008, three school districts received funding under the Mentoring, Educational, and Employment Strategies (MEES) to Improve Academic, Social and Career Pathway Outcomes in Persistently Dangerous Schools initiative. The MEES initiative was intended to implement comprehensive school reform efforts in nine schools, that were designated as “persistently dangerous,” within their districts under the Unsafe School Choice Option of the No Child Left Behind legislation. Seven of the schools were in the School District of Philadelphia, and the last two schools located in Berkshire, New York and Baltimore, Maryland.

This evaluation included a planning review conducted in 2008 and an early implementation study conducted by gathering qualitative data from interviews and site visits to each school during the 2009-2010 school year. The study investigators also drew quantitative data from management information system reports, the School District of Philadelphia, and the Philadelphia Youth Network.

3. Publication Description. As part of the MEES initiative, SPRA examined strategies and reforms that supported educational, mentoring, employment and case management activities. The study further examined the effects of these efforts to reduce violence, improve educational outcomes and academic performance, decrease drop-out rates, and improve student behavior on goals and outcomes. Following is a short description of each occasional paper.

Mentoring, Educational, and Employment Strategies to Improve Academic, Social and Career Pathway Outcomes in Persistently Dangerous Schools: Planning Report, ETA Occasional Paper.

This report summarizes evaluation findings collected through telephone interviews and site visits, and concludes that the effects of the activities provided by grantees were evidenced at all the schools by: 1) smaller class sizes, 2) shared planning time for teachers, 3) new programs for credit-deficient students, and 4) increased supportive services. The evaluators found that, in most cases, school stakeholders were prepared to create fundamental change in their schools.

Early Implementation Report: Mentoring, Educational, and Employment Strategies to Improve Academic, Social and Career Pathway Outcomes in Persistently Dangerous Schools – Generation I Final Report, ETA Occasional Paper.

This report presents the accomplishments and challenges from the grant school district projects during the 2009 and 2010 school years. Key findings identify the need for extensive capacity-building and teacher professional development, reduced student-to-teacher ratios, smaller class sizes, remedial support, specialized Ninth Grade Academies, multiple mentoring strategies, and student career centers. Some of the challenges identified include delays in the contract approval process that slowed the grant implementation process and the presence of many different providers that at times created difficulties for full project integration into the school community.

Implications of the core findings include:

- Stakeholders believe that the first implementation year provided an opportunity to lay the groundwork for effective change. Even so, time is needed for interventions provided by the grantees to be developed and integrated into the school culture.
- Processes for administrative activities such as contract approvals, budget modifications, facility improvements, and hiring staff are timing factors that should be considered in the planning process. Time to build staff and partner relationships is also necessary to launch such programs.
- Schools would benefit from a second year of grant implementation to invest in and develop the MEES-funded reforms without the introduction of numerous additional directives for change. Although some district-level ideas complement the goals of the grant, it is difficult to execute them well or follow-through on plans in an environment where priorities frequently change.
- Indications that the schools are on the right track include: 1) a strong focus on creating integrated reform, 2) enhanced communication and collaboration, 3) improved quality of the teaching staff, 4) and creation of small learning communities and collaborative structures that can be sustained beyond the life of these grants.

4. Inquiries. To view abstracts of the two publications, as well as to download the full reports, visit the ETA Occasional Paper Series Web site at: <http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/keyword.cfm>.