



# “I HAVE A DREAM”<sup>®</sup>: THE IMPACTS

Prepared by ARETE CORPORATION, Fall 2001

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Arete Corporation, a New York City-based consulting firm, has engaged in research, evaluation, planning, budget analysis, and policy since 1991, specializing in public, private, and higher education, and has been the evaluator for the National “I Have a Dream”<sup>®</sup> Foundation since 1999. This summary is based on 8 local studies and evaluations. Taken as a whole, this body of research shows that “I Have a Dream”<sup>®</sup> has a dramatic impact on helping children succeed.

## MEASURABLE EFFECTS

**GRADUATION RATES:** Six studies measured high school graduation rates against either a control group or a baseline average for the district. In every case, Dreamer rates were significantly higher, more than double the average in two cases.

- Of the original PS 121 Dreamers in New York City, 90% graduated or obtained GED degrees. Prior history suggested that only 25% would.
- In Chicago, 69% of Dreamers in the classes of 1993 and 1994 graduated, in districts with a dropout rate of 60%. The class of 1996 did even better with a 75% graduation rate, more than double that of control groups.
- In Portland, Oregon, Dreamers’ expected graduation rates for the class of 1998 were 10-15 percentage points higher than control groups. Two Dreamers even graduated a year early.
- Dreamers in Paterson, NJ were “significantly more likely to graduate than students in the same school from the previous year.”

**COLLEGE ATTENDANCE:** Four studies examined the number of Dreamers who attended college or other postsecondary institutions and found exceptionally high rates of attendance in every case.

- Half of the original New York PS 121 Dreamers went on to postsecondary education.
- Students in the 1996 Chicago study attended college about three times as often as those in comparison groups.
- About half the active Dreamers in Portland were expected to graduate on time and attend college within a year.

**ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE—GRADES AND TEST SCORES:** Three studies found significant improvements in grades and/or test scores among Dreamers.

- The percentage of Portland Dreamers with GPAs of C+ or better exceeded those in two comparison groups, in one case by 11-13 percentage points.
- Portland Dreamers also improved on the Portland Achievement Levels Test (PALT). By the end of 8th grade, 64% of Dreamers had met the PALT reading graduation standard (10-13 percentage points higher than control groups). Twice as many Dreamers met the math standard as in control groups.
- After a New York Project developed individual tutoring plans for Dreamers, their math scores improved.
- Participation in the Houston “I Have a Dream”<sup>®</sup> participation was determined to have a positive effect on academic achievement, higher still for those Dreamers who had developed relationships with “Dream Partners” (mentors).

**SCHOOL ATTENDANCE:** “I Have a Dream”<sup>®</sup> has had positive effects on students’ attendance records.

- 80% of Portland Dreamers attended school at least 85% of the time, compared to 63-70% in control groups.
- The Houston study found that Dreamers doing poorly stayed in school when, statistically, they would have been expected to drop out.

For follow-up questions, call  
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## ATTITUDINAL AND BEHAVIORAL BENEFITS

### **TEEN MOTHERS: “I Have a Dream”<sup>®</sup> made an impressive impact on teenaged mothers.**

- Although the Portland program did not reduce teen birth rates, it kept Dreamers with children in school and on schedule. 73% were expected to graduate from high school, compared to a nationwide average of only 30%. Three graduated early and two were already attending community college. The resulting increase in the mothers’ combined lifetime earnings is estimated at \$943,000—almost as much as the entire cost of the “I Have a Dream”<sup>®</sup> Project.

### **EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS: In virtually every Project, both quantitative and qualitative measures of Dreamers’ aspirations show higher aspirations and more positive attitudes about school, life, and the future. Specifically:**

- Portland Dreamers overwhelmingly believed it was important to do well in school (92%), felt hopeful about the future (89%), expected to get a high school diploma (95%), and planned to attend college (95%).
- A Public/Private Ventures study of Washington, DC Projects found that “I Have a Dream”<sup>®</sup> had positive effects on students’ aspirations and attitudes toward education.
- Houston Dreamers who spent time with Dream Partners (mentors) outside of regular sessions showed more realistic career goals than those who did not.

### **PEER GROUPS AND PEER PRESSURE: Three studies offered important perspectives on teens’ relationships with their peers. All concluded that Dreamers were better able to resist negative peer pressure, to support one another, and to serve as role models.**

- In Houston, the longer students were in the program and paired with Dream Partners, the better they were able to resist peer pressure.
- Chicago students stressed the importance of friendships with fellow Dreamers; the study found that “peer interactions ... created norms which supported success.”
- In Pasadena, independent researchers found a “ripple effect” among Dreamer families, with siblings reconsidering their own life choices on the basis of their experience with program activities in every family observed.

### **RESILIENCE: Two studies (Houston and Chicago) showed that “I Have a Dream”<sup>®</sup> buffers the effects of an “alarming number” of traumatic life events among its students, helping them maintain or increase academic achievement and well-being over time.**

### **DELINQUENCY: The Portland study found a dramatic drop in the number of times male Dreamers were referred to the juvenile justice system. While about as many individual males were referred as in control groups, individuals were referred less often. Referrals per male Dreamer were only 57-58% as high as in control groups.**

### **PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: Although Chicago students were skeptical at first, 92% participated in program activities and at least 90% continued their relationships with their Project Coordinators after graduation. The same study found that students’ relationships with staff were at least as important a factor as need in their decisions to seek tutoring or help with personal problems.**

### **COST BENEFIT: The Portland study examined the costs and benefits to society of Dreamers’ improved life outlooks, estimating that if only eight Dreamers graduate from high school who otherwise would not, the economic benefits of their increased earnings would equal or exceed the million-dollar cost of the Project.**

- The estimated increase in lifetime earnings among the 11 teen mothers alone equals over 94% of the Project’s cost.
- Lower juvenile delinquency among male Dreamers saved the city of Portland about \$374,000 over six years.
- The combined economic benefits to society are estimated at 131.7% of what it cost to fund the program—even before adding in the expected higher graduation rates for the other Dreamers.

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