



Boosted Diplomas

Evaluation Report 2021-2022 School Year

November 2022

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Introduction

Boosted Diplomas, a non-profit organization in Reno, Nevada, provides tutoring, education advocacy, and college and career advocacy services for students in foster care and other at-risk students in Washoe County. Since 2018, Boosted Diplomas has worked alongside the Washoe County Human Services agency (WCHSA) by providing educational advocacy and tutoring to high school students in foster care through Achievements Unlocked (AU). Boosted Diplomas was able to hire a full-time director to oversee the program in August 2021. As a result, Boosted Diplomas opened the program eligibility to serve students in all grade levels (not just high school students), including students who have left high school (who can receive college and career advocacy services). The program still primarily serves students in foster care, but that can include students who were previously in foster care, and other at-risk youth including children in transition (CIT), financially at-risk students, etc. During the 2021-2022 school year, students were provided the following services:

- ◇ **Weekly Tutoring.** Students can be assigned to be tutored by academically successful college students or recent college graduates in subject areas of need. Tutors have experience in both the subject areas they teach as well as past tutoring experience, and they know how to teach students with different learning styles.
- ◇ **Educational Advocacy.** High school students are assigned an educational advocate (EA) who serve as an educational parent to students and fill a role students might not otherwise have in their lives. EAs support students in all of their educational needs such as helping students stay on track for graduation, engaging students in their classes and coursework, communicating with school staff on behalf of the student to remove educational barriers, helping students complete educational forms, or attending IEP meetings. EAs also identify other services students might need and connect them to additional Boosted Diplomas services such as tutoring, college and career advocacy, or peer mentorship.
- ◇ **College and Career Advocacy.** Juniors, seniors, and recent high school students can be paired with a College and Career Advocate (CCA) to help them assess current skills, interests, and abilities to determine a path for them after high school whether that be trade school, military, college, etc. If students pursue higher education, CCAs support students through applications, financial assistance documents, campus resources, and stay in touch with students in their first year to ensure they have the supports needed to be successful. Boosted Diplomas is also connected with business partners in the community who work with CCAs to provide professional services and supports to students if they choose the vocational route.
- ◇ **On Track.** On Track is a new program in which students meet with a peer navigator once per week. A peer navigator works with each student to review the student's status in each of their classes and help determine where they might have missing assignments, or can review their grades and testing materials to better understand the tutoring needs they might have. This program was introduced after students would attend tutoring and not have any work they needed to cover with their tutor or educational advocate. Peer navigators can fill this void by understanding and addressing the individual needs a student might have and can then communicate that to the tutor and/or educational advocate. Because this program is new and

only approximately a dozen students received services, it is not included in this year's outcome evaluation.

The purpose of this report is to examine program implementation and outcomes for students served by the Boosted Diplomas program. Specifically, we examine what services students received and how often (program dosage), and academic and non-academic outcomes:

- ◇ Grade point average (GPA)
- ◇ Class grades
- ◇ Credits attempted and credits earned
- ◇ Graduation
- ◇ Unexcused school absences
- ◇ Interest and participation in hobbies, clubs, or sports

Data for this evaluation are from two sources: WCHSA data that include academic outcome data from the school district's Infinite Campus system, and a database built by Boosted Diplomas administration that tracks implementation and outcome data overtime. Through this system, educational advocates can enter and update data for their students throughout the school year. Data provided by Boosted Diplomas were combined with WCHSA data in order to compare students who participated in the program to other foster care students in Washoe County. We also used this data to examine any changes between the first and second academic terms. There were 65 high school students identified who were in foster care during the 2021-2022 school year but were not part of the Boosted Diplomas program, who served as a comparison group. Where appropriate, analyses were conducted to determine if there were any statistically significant differences between groups or between the first and second academic terms. A threshold of $p = 0.05$ was set and any p -values less than that threshold indicated a statistically significant difference.

Students Served

During the 2021-2022 school year, 81 students received tutoring and/or educational advocacy services (1 student received College and Career Advocacy but did not receive tutoring or EA services). Three of these students were not enrolled in Washoe County School District (WCSD), and did not have data available either through Boosted Diplomas or WCHSA and they were dropped from the analyses. Most of the students were high school students ($n=53$), there were 12 elementary school students, 11 middle school students, and 2 students enrolled in an adult degree program. However, not all 53 high school students completed the year with Boosted Diplomas; some left the program due to non-communication, incarceration, or no longer needing services. A total of 45 high school students were receiving services (or had graduated) toward the end of the school year. This report includes analyses from both students who completed the school year with Boosted Diplomas and those who did not. Sixty-one students were in their first year of the program (of those in their first year, 19 started receiving services part way through the school year), 9 students were in their 2nd year, 3 students were in their 3rd year, and 4 were in their 4th year (1 student did not have a start date). Because it was the first year offering services to younger students and limited data were available, we focused the evaluation on high school students.

Program Implementation

We first examined program dosage, or how much of each service was provided during the 2021-2022 school year, focusing on tutoring and educational advocacy. Of all students served, 29 students received tutoring services only, 24 received educational advocacy only, and 24 students received both tutoring and educational advocacy. There were also 5 students (including one who did not receive tutoring or EA services) who received College and Career Advocacy Services. Of the high school students who participated in Boosted Diplomas, 6 received tutoring only, 22 received EA services only, and 24 received both tutoring and EA. Table 1 displays the average number of hours Boosted Diplomas provided to students during the 2021-2022 school year.

Table 1. Average number of hours students received in tutoring and educational advocacy during the 2021-2022 school year.

	Tutoring (All students, n=53)	Tutoring (HS Only, n=30)	Educational Advocacy (HS only, n=46)
Average Hours	13.65	15.39	11.20
Median Hours	13	14.67	10.88
Minimum Hours	1	2	1.58
Maximum Hours	39	39	25.25

Grade Point Average (GPA)

Data were examined to determine whether there were changes in GPA between the first and second term among students who received services from Boosted Diplomas and whether GPA differed between Boosted Diplomas students and the comparison group. On average, Boosted Diplomas students had lower GPAs in term 1 and term 2 compared to students in the comparison group. In the first term, the difference between the two groups was statistically significant ($t = -2.32, p = 0.02$) but these differences were not statistically significant in the second term ($p = 0.09$). Further, GPA declined among students in both groups between term 1 and term 2. The average GPA for Boosted Diplomas declined by 0.22 points, but this difference is not statistically significant ($p = 0.27$). GPA for students in the comparison group declined by 0.30 points between term 1 and term 2, and this difference is statistically significant ($p = 0.04$). In other words, while both groups saw a decline in GPA between the first and second term, only students in the comparison group experienced a statistically significant decline. Figure 1 displays the average unweighted GPA for Boosted Diplomas students and the comparison group.

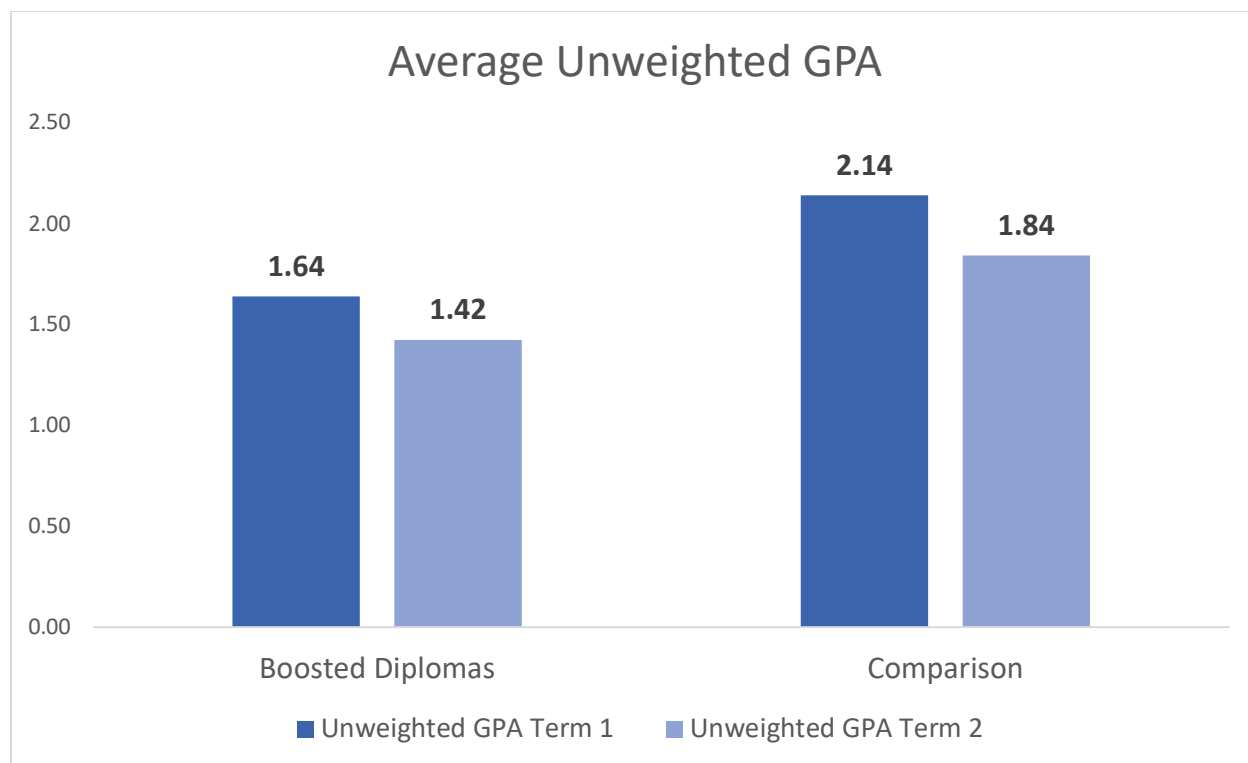


Figure 1. Average unweighted GPA for Boosted Diplomas students and comparison group students in the 2021-2022 school year.

When the 8 students who did not complete the year were removed from the analysis, average GPAs do increase slightly. The average GPA in the first term is 1.78 and 1.50 in the second term and these differences are not statistically different from the comparison group for term 1 ($p = 0.09$) or in term 2 ($p = 0.17$). In other words, when only students who completed the school year with Boosted Diplomas are included in the analysis, GPAs do slightly increase, but they are still lower than average GPAs of students in the comparison group, although this difference is no longer statistically significant.

The hours of tutoring and EA services that students received during the school year in the Boosted Diplomas program ranged from 1 to 39. Students who received more hours of tutoring services might have a higher GPA than students who received fewer hours of services. We examined correlations between the number of hours of services students received and their average GPA as shown in Table 2. None of the correlations are statistically significant, but there is a small but positive correlation between total tutoring hours and GPA in both term 1 and term 2. There is no correlation between total EA hours and GPA in term 1, but there is a small and positive correlation for GPA in term 2. For all students (including students who received both tutoring and EA services), there is a small, positive correlation between all hours of services received and GPA in both term 1 and term 2.

Table 2. Correlations between number of hours students received in services and average GPA in the 2021-2022 school year.

	Total Tutoring Hours (n=30)	Total EA Hours (n=46)	All Hours (n=53)
Unweighted GPA Term 1	0.24	0.01	0.21
Unweighted GPA Term 1	0.27	0.20	0.20

Last, GPA was also examined for Boosted Diplomas high school students by type of service the student received. Figure 2 displays the results. The highest GPAs in term 1 are for students who received both tutoring and EA services (1.9), closely followed by the 6 students who received only tutoring services (1.82). The lowest GPAs were among students who only received EA services (1.23 in term 1). Further, in term 1, GPAs for students who received tutoring and EA services were significantly higher than students who only received EA services ($p = 0.05$). There were no other statistically significant differences between groups in term 2.

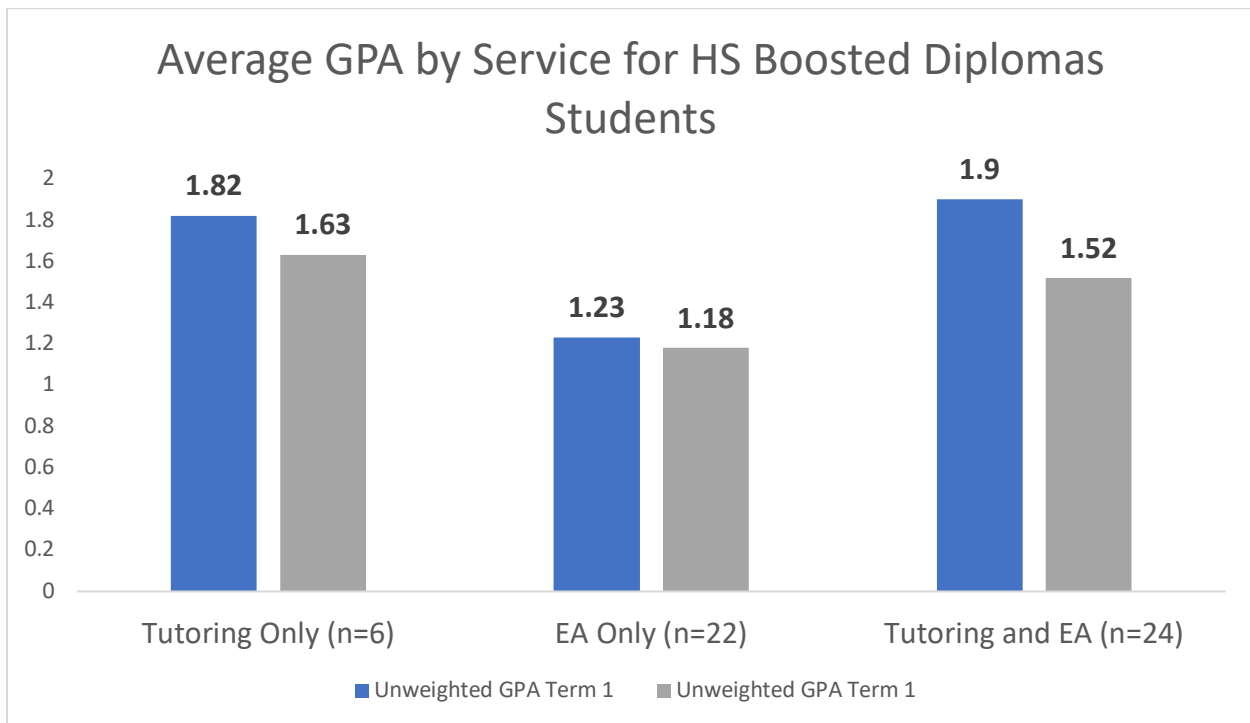


Figure 2. Average GPA for high school students in the Boosted Diplomas program and the services they received in the 2021-2022 school year.

There were some small changes to the average GPA when the analysis only includes students who completed the school year with Boosted Diplomas. There were 5 students who received only tutoring services and the average GPA of these students in term 1 was 1.73 and 1.95 in term 2, showing an increase in GPA (the n-size is too small to determine if this difference is statistically significant). Sixteen students received only EA services and their average GPA in term 1 was 1.55 and 1.22 in term 2, indicating their average GPA was slightly lower in term 2 compared to term 1. The average GPA of students who received both tutoring and EA services (n=21) did not change when the analysis only

included students who participated in Boosted Diplomas through the end of the school year (term 1 and term 2 GPAs were 1.87 and 1.59 respectively).

Class Grades

Educational Advocates entered class grades throughout the semester into the Boosted Diplomas database. As with any new data system, there were some inconsistencies in how data were entered across all students and so the decision was made to focus on changes in class grades between term 1 and term 2 only for classes in which students received tutoring in (most of the classes students received tutoring in were a math class or English/writing classes). Even so, there was significant missing data for many classes. Only 15 out of the 30 high school students who received tutoring (50% of the sample) had complete class grade data. Missing data occurred for three primary reasons: data were not entered, only one term grade was available so changes in grades could not be examined, or students did not have the same schedule from term 1 to term 2 and thus did not have comparable grades. Of the 15 students who had class grade data for the subjects they were tutored in:

- 4 experienced a decline in their class grade
- 2 experienced no grade changes
- 9 experienced an increase in their class grade

Credits Attempted vs. Credits Earned

In both term 1 and term 2, Boosted Diplomas Students earned fewer of the credits they attempted compared to students in the comparison group in both term 1 and term 2. In term 1, Boosted Diplomas students earned 72% of the credits they attempted (students who were in the program at the end of the year earned 75%) whereas comparison students earned 81% of the credits they attempted. In term 2, Boosted Diplomas students earned 72% (including students who participated in the program through the end of year) of the credits they attempted compared to 82% in the comparison groups. Results are displayed in Figure 3.

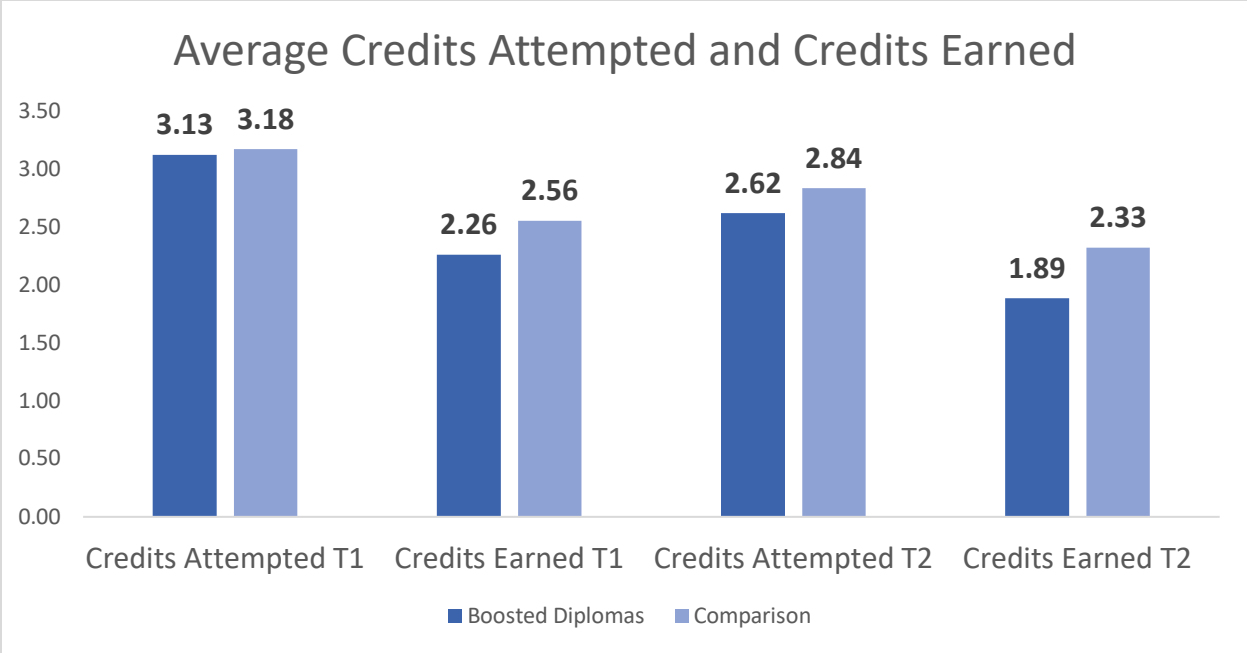


Figure 3. Number of credits attempted and credits earned in the 1st and 2nd terms for Boosted Diplomas and comparison group students in the 2021-2022 school year.

Graduation

There were 15 students who participated in the Boosted Diplomas program who were eligible for graduation in 2022 and 12 students in the comparison group. Students were included in graduation statistics if they were in 12th grade (or 2nd year grade 12) in the 2021-2022 school year. There was one student who was removed because they were still enrolled in school and thus not counted as a graduate or a non-graduate. Of the 15 Boosted Diplomas students, 8 graduated (53%) and in the comparison group, 4 students graduated (33%¹), but the difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.30$). However, three of the non-graduates were not active in Boosted Diplomas for the entire school year and when they were removed from the analysis, the graduation rate for Boosted Diplomas students was 67%. It is also important to note that of the non-graduates, there were at least two students who were still receiving support from their educational advocates as they pursued to take the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET).

Additional analyses of 12th grade Boosted Diplomas students indicated that of those who graduated, all but one student had been in the program at least one year. One graduating student was in their 2nd year of the program, 3 were in their 3rd year, and 2 were in their 4th year (one student did not have a program entry date). Of the Boosted Diplomas students who did not graduate ($n=7$), 5 were in their first year of the Boosted Diplomas program (and 2 of those students started receiving services partway through the school year), and 2 were in their 2nd year. Table 3 displays the row percentage of graduation status by years in the program and demonstrates that of 12th grade Boosted Diplomas students, those who graduated had been in the program longer compared to those who did not graduate.

¹ Graduation statistics were updated as of June 2022

Table 3. Percentage of 12th grade Boosted Diplomas student graduation status by length of time in the program.

	1 Year	2 Years	3 Years	4 Years
Graduates (*n=7)	14%	14%	43%	29%
Non-Graduates (n=7)	71%	29%	0%	0%

*Note. The total number of graduating students was 8, but one student did not have a program entry date and they are not included in these statistics.

Unexcused Absences

Unexcused absences by term were measured by the number of class periods in a day that students were marked absent. Figure 4 shows the average unexcused absences for Boosted Diplomas students and the comparison group for term 1 and term 2. On average, the number of unexcused absences decreased between term 1 and term 2 for Boosted Diplomas students, although this difference is not statistically significant ($p = 0.31$). For the comparison group, average unexcused absences increased, and this increase is statistically significant. In other words, students in the comparison group experience a statistically significant increase in unexcused absences but the same pattern was not found for Boosted Diplomas students.

In term 1, Boosted Diplomas students had more unexcused absences than the comparison group (79.74 vs. 53.29), a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.04$). In term 2, there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups, and in fact, students in the comparison group had a higher number of absences (80.63 compared to Boosted Diplomas students, 53.29). Attendance in school can be one indication that Boosted Diplomas students might be more engaged in school throughout the school year. When only the 45 Boosted Diplomas students who completed the school year are included, there is no difference in their attendance between term 1 (73.53) and term 2 (73.0).

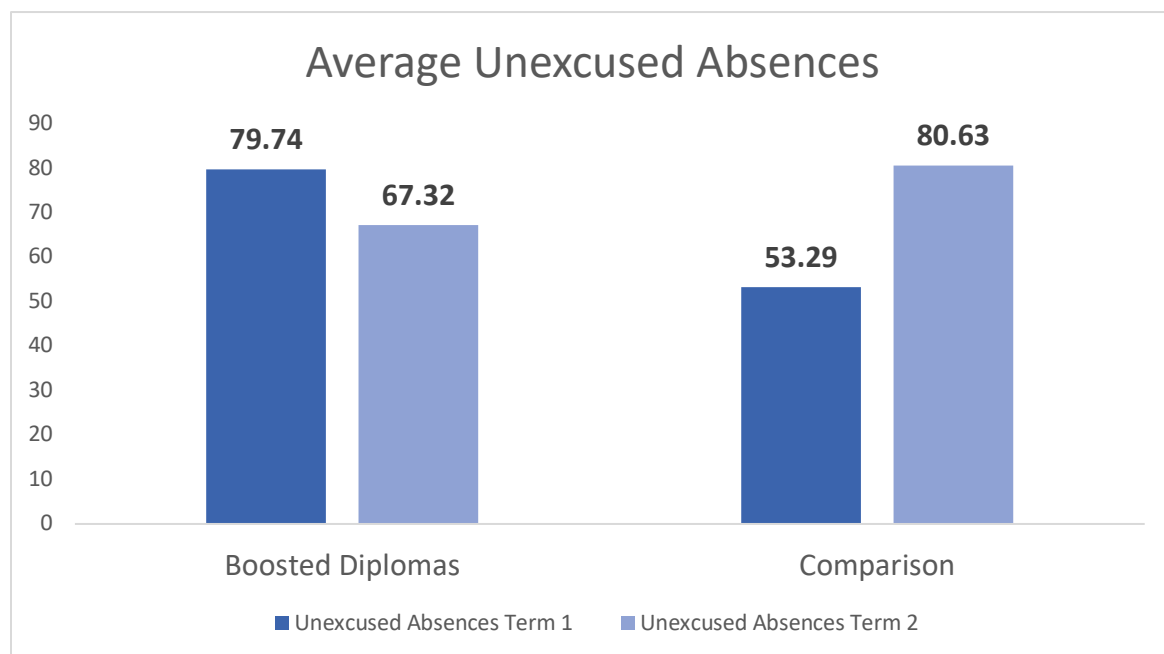


Figure 4. Average unexcused class absences during the 2021-2022 school year.

Club/Sport Interest and Participation

In addition to academic outcomes, Boosted Diplomas and educational advocates can encourage students to explore their interests and hobbies and participate in clubs and sports. Tracking club and sport involvement was new to the program this year and as such, data were not always entered or consistent. However, there were some data entered for 16 students, and an additional 38 students had open-response comments that EAs included about their interests and activities which are summarized below.

Data indicated that there were 11 students who expressed interest in a sport (and 2 who also expressed interest in a club) but were not participating in a sport. There were 5 students who were participating in sports: 3 participating in school sports and 2 participating in a community league or at their placement. The comments that educational advocates left for students indicated that students have a wide range of interests. A summary of student interests and involvement can be found in Table 4 (some students had multiple interests, and as such the total is higher than 38).

Table 4. Summary of student interests

Student Interest	Number of Students
Sports	15
Art	5
Video Games	5
Music	4
No interests	3
Clubs / Activities	3
Theatre / Drama	2
Job	2
ROTC	1

Summary

The findings from the 2021-2022 school year highlight some successes of the Boosted Diplomas program and identify areas for opportunity. Boosted Diplomas students experienced higher graduation rates compared to students in the comparison group, and graduation rates were even higher for students who completed the year participating in Boosted Diplomas services. Boosted Diplomas students who did graduate had been in the program and receiving services longer compared to Boosted Diplomas students who did not graduate. The overall graduation numbers are too small to detect any statistically significant differences, but the association between length of time in the program and graduation could be an indication that students might be benefitting from sustained services provided overtime. Further, even if students did not graduate, they can still receive important supports as they pursue other options including the HiSET, demonstrating the importance of continuing to provide services to students even if they are no longer enrolled in a traditional high school. These results are correlational and it possible the relationship is reversed (that is, students who were already on track to graduate were more likely to be engaged with Boosted Diplomas). Boosted Diplomas should consider continuing to track long-term involvement to determine if they continue to see this pattern, especially as Boosted Diplomas has expanded its eligibility criteria. Further, expanding the eligibility criteria for program participation might

also have a positive association on academic outcomes as students are now able to remain in the program even if they exit foster care or leave high school.

Boosted Diplomas students on average had lower GPAs, attempted and earned fewer credits, and had higher unexcused absences compared to comparison students, especially in term 1. These differences were smaller in term 2 and Boosted Diplomas students did experience a decline in unexcused absences in term 2 whereas students in the comparison group experienced an increase in absences. Attendance can be one indicator of school engagement suggesting that Boosted Diplomas students could have been more engaged in their second term, although this difference is small and not statistically significant.

Further analysis of GPA and the type of service Boosted Diplomas students received indicated that tutoring services paired with EA might have a small, but more positive association with GPA compared to students who only received EA services, especially in the first term. Among program participants, the average GPA of students who received both tutoring and EA services was higher compared to students who just received EA services in term 1 (and this difference was statistically significant in term 1). Although differences were not significant in term 2, average GPAs were higher among students who received tutoring and EA services compared to students who only received EA services. As such, staff might consider increasing tutoring that is offered in addition to educational advocacy. Further, the addition of the On Track services might be beneficial in determining the specific supports students need, which could have an impact on GPA in the future. Class grade data was also examined only for students who were tutored. There was significant missing class grade data, but of the data that were available, class grades of subjects students received tutoring in were more likely to increase than to decrease.

The year was not without its challenges. As with many educational agencies, it was challenging to hire and retain experienced tutors. Boosted Diplomas leadership put significant effort into recruiting and retaining qualified tutors throughout the year, but it did take several months to have sufficient staff. This could be one explanation as to why Boosted Diplomas students experienced a small decline in some areas such as GPA and had lower GPAs compared to the students in the comparison group. On average, students received approximately 11-15 hours of tutoring and/or educational advocacy, which is less than once per week for the school year. Students might need more support in order to experience increases in their academic outcomes over time. Another possibility is that Boosted Diplomas students could have been at higher academic risk compared to students in the comparison group. Data were not available to test that hypothesis and so we cannot conclude whether this is a possible explanation. Future evaluations should examine this possibility if these data are available.

The data for this evaluation came from two sources: WCHSA administrative school data, and a database developed by Boosted Diplomas where educational advocates can enter and track data and data are updated over time. This data system allowed for tracking program dosage and we were able to link that to program outcomes. It was also a useful system for tracking variables such as class grades and sport/club participation. As with any new data tracking system, there were limitations. Data were not always entered consistently which resulted in missing data, which can affect analyses and interpretation of results.

Despite the data and program challenges, we were still able to examine data from WCHSA and link that to program participation, and show that Boosted Diplomas was successful in serving 81 K-12 students (even if all students did not necessarily remain in the program through the end of the year), many who are transitioning into young adulthood. In its second year of new administration and more robust hiring practices, Boosted Diplomas should continue to track and collect data on program dosage and

educational data to better connect implementation to outcomes. Further, the addition of the On Track program could help to better identify the specific supports and needs of students so that tutors and educational advocates are better able to provide targeted supports. Many of the students Boosted Diplomas serves might not receive these kinds of supports elsewhere in their life and educational advocates can fill this critical role for at-risk students. These services can be especially important for students transitioning into young adulthood and learning to navigate the challenges that come with that transition.