

YO! Education Impact

Executive Summary

The Baltimore YO! program has stressed the importance for youth to have the opportunity to gain educational credentials. What impact has this program focus achieved? In order to address this question, the educational outcomes for both in-school and out-of-school YO! participants were reviewed and compared. The results indicated a significant educational impact on the lives of youth who actively participated in the program.

For the in-school youth at four city high schools, the YO! youth:

- *Had a significantly better daily attendance;*
- *They dropped out of school at a rate that was half that of their school peers; and*
- *They had a higher overall graduation rate.*

For the YO! Youth who were not in school when they started the program, the outcomes are equally as impressive. The program records for these out-of-school youth indicate that:

- *One youth achieved a Baccalaureate Degree*
- *Four youth achieved Associate of Arts Degrees*
- *One Hundred and Fifteen (115) youth gained their High School Diplomas*
- *One Hundred and Eighty Two (182) youth achieved their GEDs*

These results do not factor in the hundreds of youth who are still in the educational pipeline and who will – before the end of the program – achieve one of the educational goals listed above and add to the positive outcomes.

However, did the program play a role in fostering educational accomplishments, or are the results simply what would be expected with this cohort of youth? To address this issue of program impact, a comparison of high school dropout youth was completed, and this comparison indicated that youth who were active YO! participants obtained their GEDs at a rate that was double that of the youth who did not actively participate -- providing a strong indication of a direct program influence.

Background

The Baltimore YO! program has stressed the importance for youth to have the opportunity to gain educational credentials. From program policies that encourage all youth who have not completed high school to participate in an educational activity to funding both in-school staff and out-of-school GED instructors at each YO! Center, the program has sent a consistent message as to the value of education. What impact has this program focus achieved? In order to address this question, it was decided to look at the YO! educational activities and to ascertain if there have been any positive results.

Before discussing the results of YO! educational programming efforts, a brief description of the YO! Program in terms of educational opportunities is warranted. Essentially, there are two distinct YO! educational programs – one for out-of-school youth and the other for in-school youth who have been identified as at-risk of dropping out prior to graduation. The out-of-school effort is coordinated at each YO! center, and the foundation of this effort is a GED class at each center. In addition to the in-house classes, several of the partner programs that were funded by the YO! system also provided academic instructional services either as a stand-alone service or in conjunction with other skills training or work experience activities.

The in-school YO! programming – called Futures – operates in the four Baltimore City High Schools that are most likely to enroll youth who reside in the Empowerment Zone. These schools are:

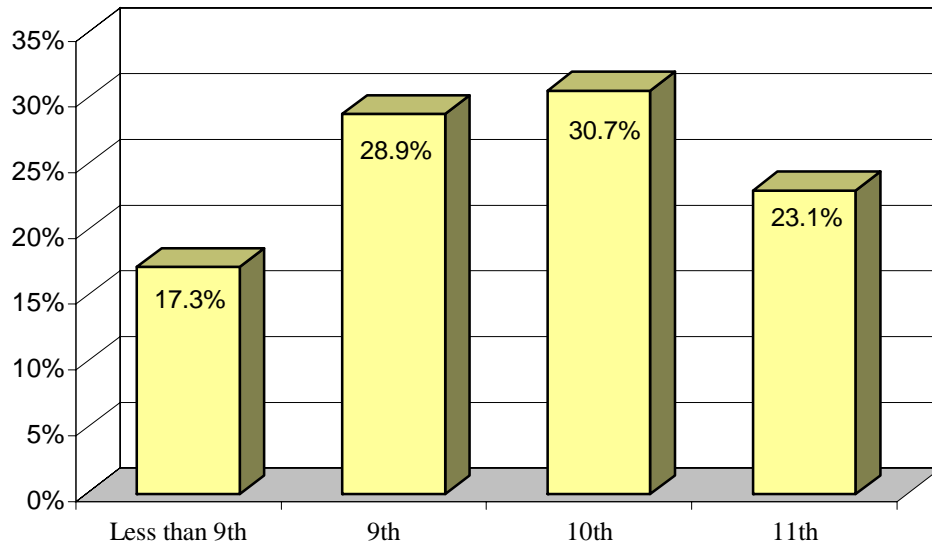
- Frederick Douglass
- Southwestern
- Southern
- Patterson

YO! funded support staff were stationed at each school to offer support services, tutoring and linkages to other developmental YO! activities that could assist the students to stay in school and graduate.

Academic Status of YO! Youth

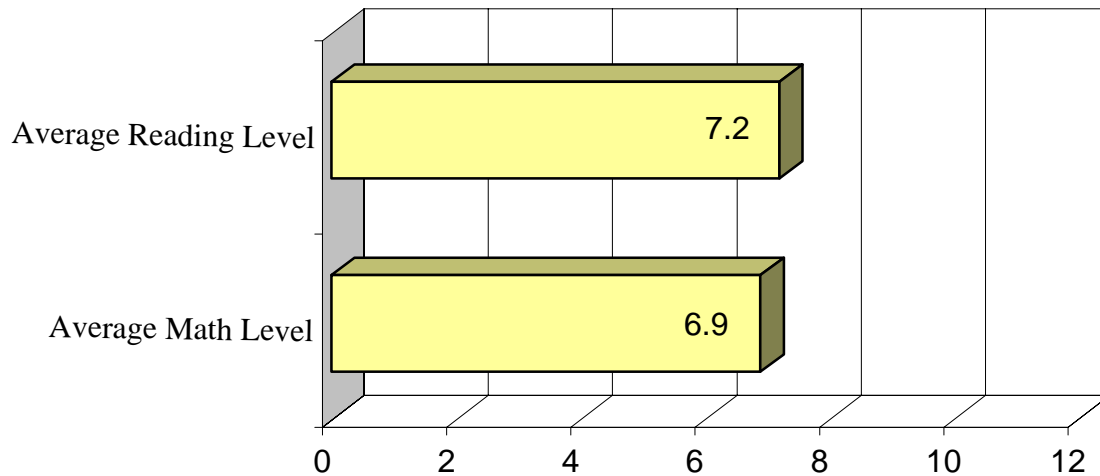
Based on enrollments as of February 2005, three thousand, nine hundred and seven (3,907) youth had completed an enrollment form for the YO! program. Seven hundred and thirty five (735) of these youth were in the in school YO! Futures program. The balance – 3,172 – were enrolled at one of the five YO! Ports. Of the youth at the Ports, 614 reported that they had a high school diploma or GED, and 211 reported to be attending school. The remaining youth, two thousand three hundred and forty-seven young people (2,347), enrolled in the YO! program at one of the Ports were high school dropouts. As self reported in their intake interview, a little less than half of these dropout youth claimed to have completed the 9th grade. The following chart shows the educational attainment level reported by the youth at the time of intake.

Reported Educational Attainment Levels



If the assessment data is reviewed on the out-of-school youth who were dropouts, it shows an even greater level of academic deficiencies than the self reported grade accomplishment information. Using the automated data system, which was instituted more than a year after the start of the program, we have intake academic assessment information on 1,839 youth who were school dropouts. The TABE reading and math scores were tabulated for this group and the following chart shows the average reading and math comprehension levels at time of intake to the YO! Program.

TABE Assessment Scores



Clearly, the YO! out-of-school youth who had dropped out of school prior to graduation had significant academic deficiencies.

Because YO!-Futures staff had access to the YO! Futures youth school records, the program did not require an academic assessment upon intake. Therefore, there is no electronic data available as to the reading and math levels for the in-school youth. However, as residents of the most improvised neighborhoods in the City and based on past evidence as to the direct relationship of poverty and substandard school performance, the YO! Futures youth were -- in all likelihood -- among the most disadvantaged cohort of youth attending each of their respective schools.

The Impact – In School

From the start of the YO! Futures program to February of 2005, seven hundred and thirty five (735) youth have been enrolled in the program. To date, three hundred and nine have graduated with a high school diploma, and many more are still in the program, in school, and on track to graduate.

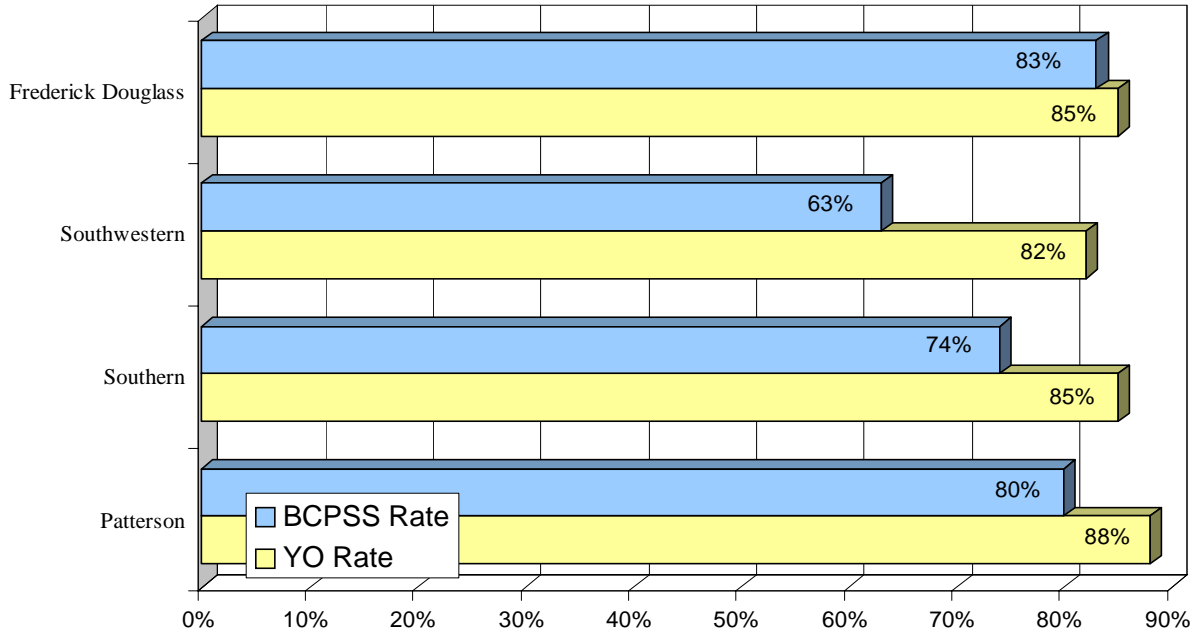
What role did the YO! Futures effort play in assisting these in-school youth to gain their high school credential? It was determined that comparing the YO! Futures youth performance to the performance of the youth who were enrolled at the same schools would provide a reasonable comparison approach for considering the overall impact of the YO! effort and would provide an indication of program impact.

Three key indicators were selected as comparison points. The first two were daily attendance rates and annual dropout rates. Since data were available on each school as to how its student population fared relative to these indicators, a comparison was straightforward.

Comparing the third indicator, graduation rates, was a bit more challenging. Many of the YO! Futures youth are still in school and will not graduate until 2005, 2006 and 2007. Furthermore, a portion of the YO! Futures youth entered the program in their junior and senior years. Graduation rates are typically calculated by measuring the rate of graduation of a particular ninth grade cohort of youth four years after they enter school. We determined that taking our cohort of ninth grade YO! Futures students who entered the program in 2000 – there were 107 of them at the four schools -- and comparing their graduation rate to the rate that the Maryland State Department of Education publishes for the four schools in 2004 would be the most accurate way of comparing graduation rates.

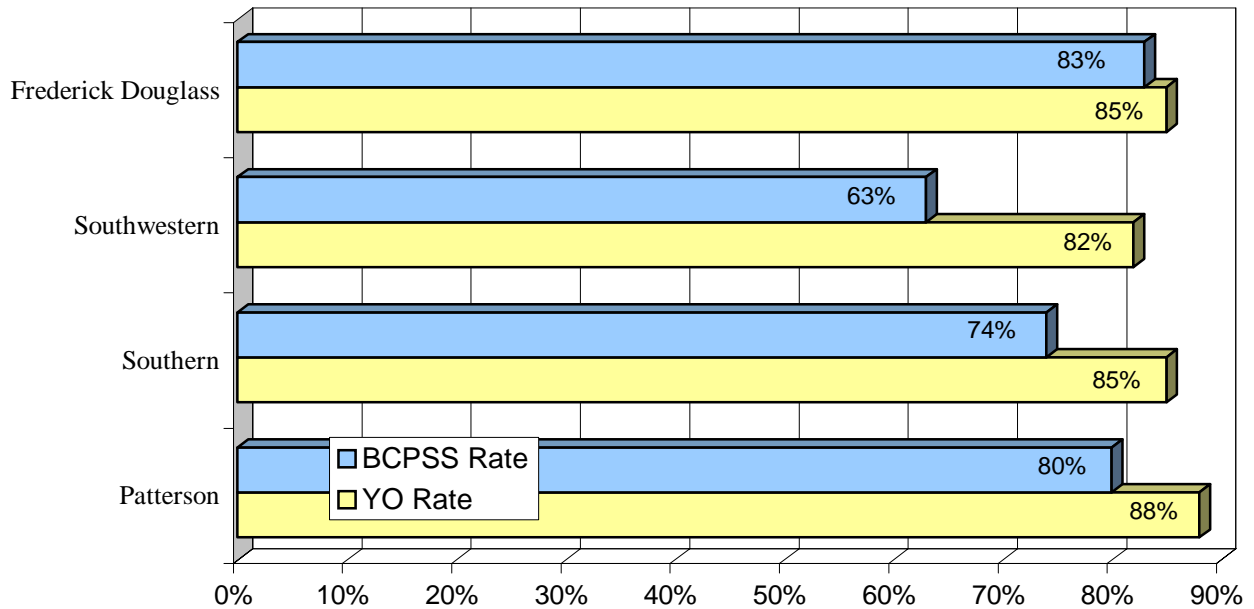
As most teachers and school systems will attest, the first critical step for success in school – as with most endeavors in life – is showing up. That is why daily attendance is a good indicator of a future positive outcome. As the following charts indicate, YO!-Futures youth had significantly higher attendance rates than their non-YO! school companions by a significant margin. In school year 2003, the overall YO! daily student attendance averaged between eighty-two and eighty-eight percent while the overall school averages were between sixty three and eighty three percent.

2003 Attendance Comparison



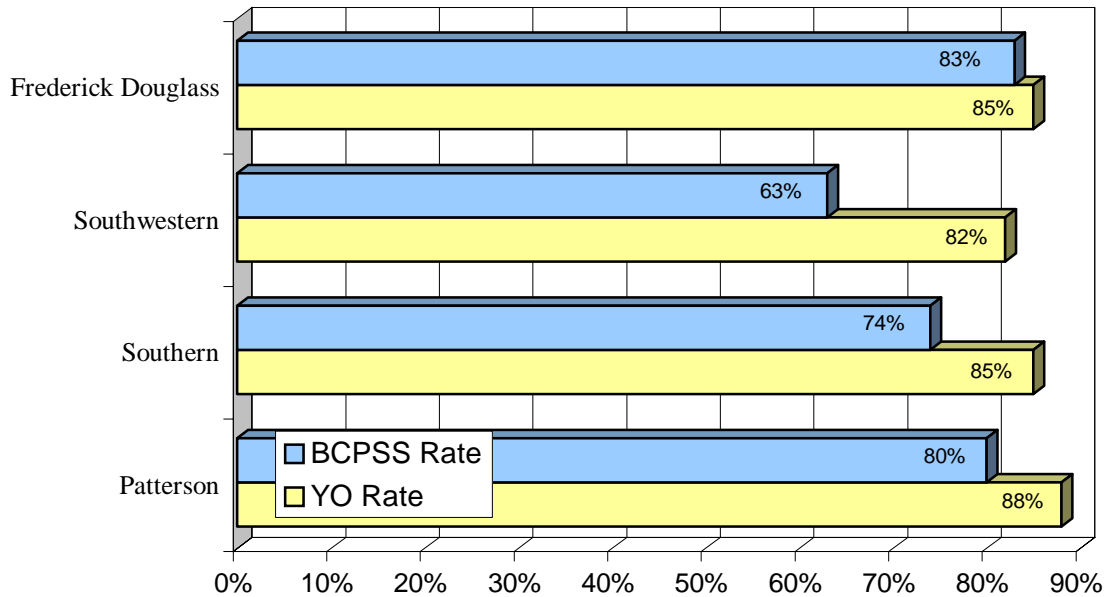
The data for the school year that ended in June of 2004 are even more impressive, with the YO!-Futures youth at each of the four schools having an even higher daily attendance rate than in 2003. In 2004 YO! daily student attendance averaged between eighty-three and ninety-two percent while the overall school averages fell a bit and were between fifty-nine and eighty three percent. This information is shown on the following chart.

2003 Attendance Comparison



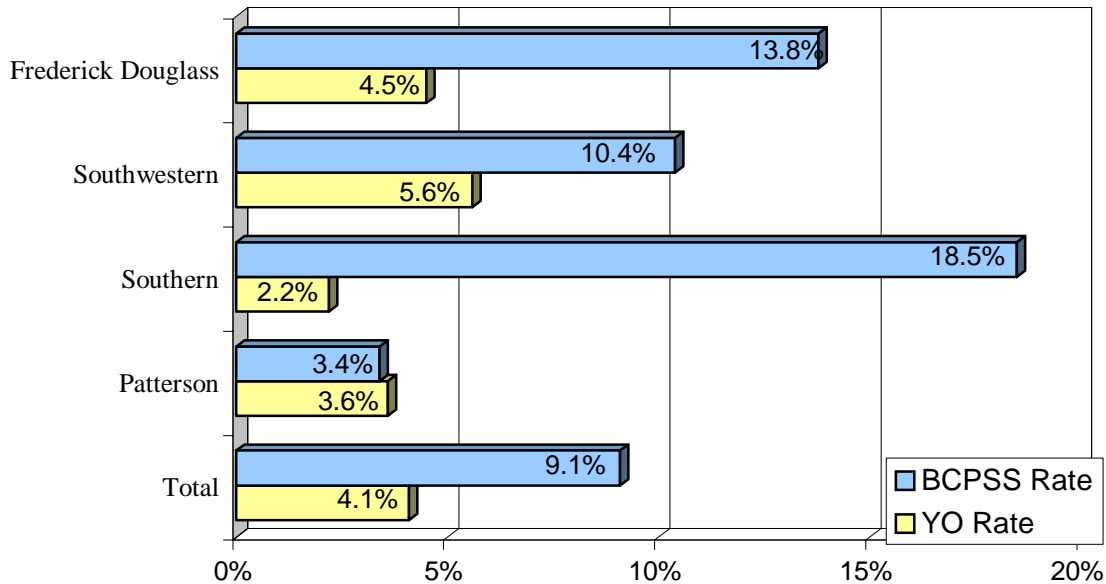
The second area of comparison was school dropouts. We defined dropout as the number of youth who were officially labeled as dropouts by the school system divided by the number of youth who started the school year. Although there were some YO! Futures youth who dropped out of school, the rate of dropouts for YO! was far less than the rate for the entire school system. The total YO! dropout rate of 4.1% was less than half that of the four schools rate of 9.3%. The following charts provide the dropout comparisons for the 2003 and 2004 school years.

2003 Attendance Comparison



The 2004 school year was almost as good as the 2003 school year. At all of the YO! schools, Futures youth stayed in school at considerably higher rates than their peers, with the exception of Patterson High, which had a slightly higher drop out rate.

2004 Dropout Rates



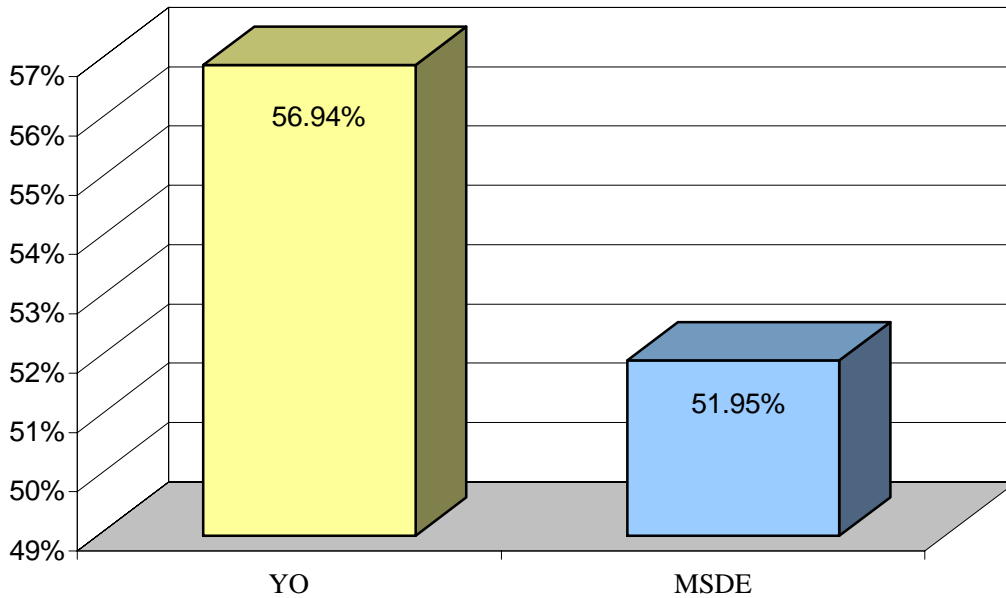
The final comparison point was graduation rates. As the table below indicates, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) reported that the four city schools had a combined graduation rate of 51.95%

Graduation Rates for 2004 ¹	
Frederick Douglass	63.77%
Southwestern	44.07%
Southern	30.23%
Patterson	77.02%
TOTAL	51.95%

As calculated with MSDE’s methodology, the YO! Futures students who entered school in the 2000 school year as freshman had a graduation rate of 56.94%, five percentages points higher than the rates of these four schools, which translated to a ten percent improvement in overall graduation rates. This is graphically shown on the following chart.

¹ From MSDE’s Internet site

Graduation Rates



The Impact – Out-Of-School

For the youth who entered the program at one of the YO! community based Ports and did not have a GED or high school diploma, the educational achievements are significant. With over 90% of the non-credentialed youth at these centers being high school dropouts, it could be expected that their educational accomplishments would be minimal. Such was not the case. Taking program records from day one to the present (February 2005) the YO! educational outcomes (not counting the in-school Futures enrollees) are:

- *One youth achieved a Baccalaureate Degree*
- *Four youth achieved Associate of Arts Degrees*
- *One Hundred and Fifteen(115) youth gained their High School Diplomas*
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These impressive results do not factor in the hundreds of youth who are still in the educational pipeline and who will – before the end of the program – achieve one of the educational goals listed above and add to the positive outcomes.

The question remains, can the program take credit for the accomplishments of these youth? Would all or some of them have achieved their educational credential in the absence of the YO! program? We decided to examine these questions. For the out-of-school youth, identifying an available control or comparison group proved to be more challenging than our in-school enrollees. However, due to the parameters for the Baltimore YO! program the US Department of Labor (USDOL) established, a viable alternative was available. USDOL set as one of its guidelines that all YO! Programs would attempt to engage 100% of all youth in the target neighborhoods. Accordingly, Baltimore YO! recruitment efforts endeavored to entice all youth to try the program. As is to be expected, some youth opted to participate while others decided not to take advantage of the

opportunities and responsibilities that were associated with YO!. This provided us with the prospect of using our YO! data base to identify youth who could serve as a comparison group.

We identified all youth who were 16 or older (at the time of registration), and who registered at YO! centers between July 1, 2000 and October 31, 2003. These dates were selected because as the data on the educational status of the incoming youth indicated, many of the youth from both groups would require a significant amount of time to gain the academic skills needed to take the GED exam. The data were then divided into two groups; actual YO! Participants and a comparison group who enrolled but did not meet the participation standards established by the US Department of Labor. In summary, participation was defined as youth who completed one or more pre-placement activity and had at least six participation months² during the period. Youth of the comparison group were defined as youth who did not complete a pre-placement activity and did not meet the monthly participation standard.

This data set was sent to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) with the request to check their GED database to ascertain who in the YO! Participant group and who in the comparison group had achieved a GED from the State. Our hypothesis was that if there was a positive difference in the overall GED attainment rates of the two groups -- since the youth were from the same neighborhoods and were nearly identical in terms of core demographic features -- then program intervention and participation could logically be considered as a major reason for the positive difference. Keep in mind that this was only a portion of the YO! enrollee data set and did not take out the YO! enrollees who the program has assisted to reenter high school. The following table shows the results of this inquiry.

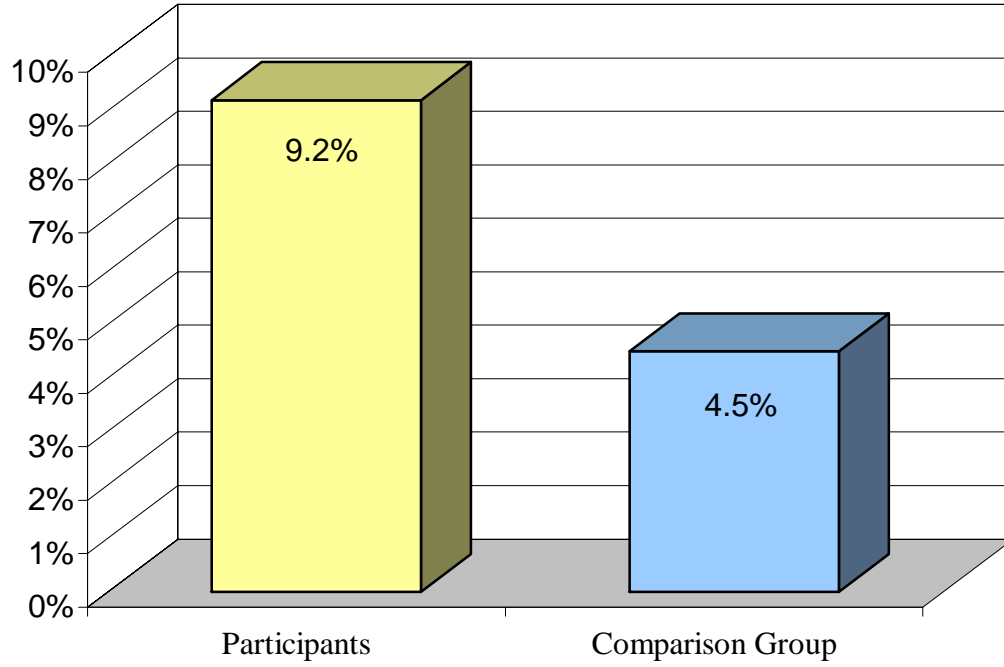
Table: GED Accomplishments

	Total	GEDs	% Accomplishment
Participants	863	79	9.2%
Comparison	619	28	4.5%

As the following graph visually indicates, the YO! participant group members were twice as likely to obtain their GED credential as were members of the comparison group.

² A participation month is defined as a calendar month in which a youth completed at least 5 hours of the same pre-placement activity.

GED Accomplishments



Clearly the program appears to have had a positive impact that would not have occurred if the youth had not participated in YO!.

YO! Baltimore Comparison Group

In an effort to evaluate the YO! Baltimore program it was decided to ascertain if a control or a comparison group of youth could be identified, youth who were essentially similar to the young people who are engaged in the YO! Baltimore program but who did not participate in the program. In line with a traditional research and evaluation approach it was thought that comparing the status of the youth who participated in YO! Baltimore to the status of those who did not participate would yield important information that would provide insight to the overall effectiveness of the program. While the creation of a traditional control group typically takes place at the onset of program operations, this approach was not allowed by US Department of Labor. In fact, at the onset of the program, all of the Youth Opportunity programs were prohibited from using any of the allocated resources for any type of program evaluation or the creation of a control group.

While not as effective as a pre identified control group, it was decided to seek a comparison group of youth who could be used for a comparison study of the youth in YO! Baltimore who actively took part in the program and youth who did not participate in the program. After exploring available alternative data sources it was determined that the best data source for identifying a group of young people to compare the YO! Baltimore participants is the YO! Baltimore data source itself. This decision was based on a number of facts. First, the US Department of Labor insisted that all Youth Opportunity programs be considered an entitlement program. Furthermore, all Youth Opportunity programs were designed as community saturation programs. US DOL monitored and rated these programs based on their efforts to actively recruit all youth who resided in the target neighborhoods. Consequently, it is believed that the overwhelming majority of the all youth who lived in the targeted areas were aggressively recruited and offered YO! Baltimore services. This provides us the opportunity to construct a comparison group of similar youth to compare to the youth who participated in the YO! Baltimore program.

Because concerted efforts were made to engage all youth in the targeted neighborhoods, the unintended result was that some youth came to one of our Ports but did not continue to actively participate in YO! Baltimore. A review of the demographic information on this group of young people indicated that they share essentially the same demographic and socio-economic circumstances as the group of youth who did actually enroll in YO! Baltimore and actively participated in the program. Therefore, these circumstances offer the opportunity to use this group of young people – youth who initially enrolled in YO! Baltimore but did not actually follow through and obtain services – as a comparison group. We have identification data on these youth, permission to obtain information on them from other agencies and the capacity to track these individuals in a similar fashion as we can track our YO! Baltimore participants.