Final DoDEA Evaluation Report
Fairbanks North Star Borough School District (FNSBSD): DIPLOMAS Project
(Developing Innovative Personalized Learning Opportunities Maximizing the Achievement of Students)

Executive Summary

The Fairbanks North Star Borough School District was awarded an FY17 grant from the U.S. Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), to provide the DIPLOMAS (Developing Innovative Personalized Learning Opportunities Maximizing the Achievement of Students) project. The DIPLOMAS project supported the implementation of personalized learning as a strategy to increase students' College and Career Readiness at the targeted military-connected schools. This final evaluation report will present evidence of the project's challenges, lessons, and accomplishments in each goal area.

The DIPLOMAS project provided support to students attending the following schools:
- Tanana Middle School (grades 7-8)
- Lathrop High School (grades 9-12)
- North Pole Middle School (grades 6-8)
- Ben Eielson Jr/Sr High School (grades 7-12)
- North Pole High School (grades 9-12)

The DIPLOMAS project provided a dedicated part-time project director who trained and led a team of school-based personnel (Student Learning Coaches) to provide up to 15 hours per week of attendance monitoring, tutoring, advocacy, and other support to military connected secondary students in five district schools. To further support the goal of increasing students' college and career readiness, the project provided extensive technology resources to support virtual learning, blended learning, and flipped learning methods in these five schools; these resources complemented the district's ongoing teacher training in personalized learning. The project director collaborated with school and district leadership to assess and address changing needs before, during, and after the COVID-19 closure of school facilities.

After difficulties filling the position of project director in the planning year of the project (2017-18), an interim was brought on in February to fulfill planning year activities and milestones. The interim director purchased and distributed student technology for each of the sites, and the baseline data for grant outcomes was established for each of the project goals.

In the second project year (2018-19), a project director (PD) was officially hired and began meeting with school leadership to develop Enhanced Learning Plans (ELPs) for each school site to assess what could be done to support personalized learning and the incorporation of technology for student success within the parameters of the grant goals and objectives. The planning process assessed the current status of how technology was utilized at each site and asked the school leadership to determine how the Student Learning Coaches (SLC) could best be utilized. The PD recruited, hired, onboarded, and trained the 11 SLCs, filling all the positions in the spring semester of the 2018-19 school year. The SLCs worked with the school leadership, teachers and PD to establish processes and procedures to identify military connected students in need of tutoring and academic assistance. The PD provided training to the SLCs on how to properly identify the students who would benefit most from various tutoring services, how to utilize district supported online/virtual materials, and how to best support the utilization of

technology in the tutoring setting. All of the Chromebooks which were purchased in the first year of the grant saw heavy usage.

In the third project year (2019-2020) the district made progress in increasing and providing professional development opportunities in online learning, blended classrooms, digital learning and flipped classrooms. All SLCs were trained in the grant outlined objectives as well as how to provide effective and collaborative tutoring services to the targeted military dependent students in each of the school sites. Until the district closed all schools in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all five participating schools were fully staffed with SLC(s). After the district transitioned to remote learning, it did not pay "temporary" employees like the SLCs or allow them to continue to work during the COVID shutdown, so many in these positions left for different jobs.

In the fourth project year (2020-21), the school district was in a remote learning status throughout the fall semester. The project director left the school district at the end of the first semester and a new PD was hired and onboarded. The new PD was formerly a Student Learning Coach and thus was highly familiar with the project, thus providing more continuity than is often the case with turnover in project leadership. Recruiting and training qualified SLCs continued to be a time intensive challenge for the PD. For over half of the 2020-2021 school year, there were unfilled vacancies for SLCs at one or more school sites. In the fall of 2020, approximately 50% of the SLC positions were filled and trained to provide support in the virtual learning environment. Early in the spring semester of 2021, the project was once again fully staffed and the SLCs were again providing in-person support within schools. However, nine of the eleven SLCs did not plan to return for the next school year.

In the fifth and final year of funding (2021-22), the PD focused on filling the SLC positions and providing training and support to enable them to provide student support in classrooms. With a focus on sustaining the positive impacts of the project, the PD reviewed the recently completed districtwide technology inventory and worked with the technology department and school principals to determine technology needs and priorities for grant funding. In support of college and career readiness, the project provided ACT/SAT preparation materials, graphing and non-graphing calculators for student use, and Chromebooks to replace those which had become obsolete since the start of the project.

While the project did not result in the hoped for decreases in the number of students with problematic attendance and increases in the number of students meeting college readiness benchmarks in math and language arts, it did implement the planned strategies with fidelity and provided academic support to military connected students engaged in virtual learning before, during, and after Covid-19 interrupted in-person schooling.

Methodology and Evaluation Questions

The project goals and respective strategies were selected to address two areas linked to college and career readiness: attendance and test scores. Both student attendance and test scores are indicators for future success in college and career settings. In order to improve college and career readiness of military connected students, the project aimed to decrease the number with "problematic attendance" by 8% (2% each implementation year) and to increase the number who met or exceeded college readiness benchmarks in Math and in Language Arts by 20% (5% each implementation year).

Goal 1, "Military dependent students with problematic attendance will demonstrate increased attendance rates", was measured by the number of 6th–12th grade students with an annual attendance rate at or below 90% each year. Goal 2, "Military dependent high school students will demonstrate college and career readiness in Math", was measured by the number of high school students who met or exceeded college readiness benchmarks in Math. MAP scores were used for 9th and 10th graders and ACT scores were used for 11th and 12th graders. Goal 3, "Military dependent high school students will demonstrate college and career readiness in Language Arts", was measured by the number of high school students who met or exceeded college readiness benchmarks in Language Arts. Once again, MAP scores were used for 9th and 10th graders and ACT scores were used for 11th and 11th graders.

Table 1: Evaluation Data & Source

Evaluation Data	Data Source
Student demographics and military/non-military connected status	District PowerSchool data
Student college and career readiness	MAP and ACT testing data
Student attendance rates	District PowerSchool data
Students served and services provided by Student Learning Coaches	SLC inputs in PowerSchool
Student, teacher, and principal feedback on project activities	Interviews and surveys
Student technology access	Device inventory and purchase records

Table 2: Evaluation Questions and Summative Response

Evaluation Question	Summative Response
Has each strategy been implemented according to plan?	All strategies were implemented each year, although some had to be adapted during the district's remote learning periods resulting from the pandemic. Strategy 1: Provide increased virtual learning opportunities (online learning, blended learning, flipped classrooms) to increase student engagement. Between the activities of this grant and the district's Covid-19 response of universal remote learning, 100% of students have participated in virtual learning. Prior to the pandemic, through concerted efforts and collaboration within the school district, the number of professional development opportunities for the effective utilization of digital content, online learning, blended learning, and flipped classrooms increased threefold within the first two project years. Strategy 2: Provide increased in-class support via access to digital content for more personalized learning experiences to increase student engagement. Increased in-class support was made possible through grant funds and activities. Chromebooks were purchased at each school

	for in-class support of students' personalized learning and to access digital content. <u>Strategy 3: Provide tutoring to increase the academic support for the student's personalized learning before, during or after the traditional school day.</u> Student Learning Coaches at each school provided in-class support to help students access digital technology, and this was done virtually in Google Classrooms when the district was in a remote learning status and in person when the district was providing in-person learning.
Did service delivery improve?	Annual data show that the services at project schools both increased and adapted to meet the fluctuating needs of the pandemic-impacted military connected students throughout the project duration. High percentages of military connected students received support from SLCs to address college and career readiness.

Outputs, Outcomes, Impacts, Transformative Results

Like many schools in districts around the country, the Project DIPLOMAS schools were impacted not only by the pandemic itself but by the pandemic mitigation efforts that limited in-person learning opportunities and in-school collaboration. In the following overview of project results, we will report school-level outcome data, results of each of the three project strategies as well as pandemic-related modifications to planned activities, and project impacts reported by principals, teachers, SLCs, and students at the target schools.

In terms of outcome measures, the project partially met the two academic goals and did not meet the attendance goal. It is important to note that the district's overall attendance rate for middle and high school students dropped drastically from the 2020-21 school year (96%) to the 2021-22 school year (88%). The project's target schools were part of this overall decline in attendance.

As shown in Table 3, the number of military dependent students with "problematic attendance" at project schools ranged from 12% to 23% at baseline (2017-18); this number ranged from 4% to 14% in the fourth project year (2021-22), at that point exceeding the project goal of an 8% decrease from baseline at each school. However, in the final project year, the district's rates of problematic attendance skyrocketed at each school, to rates almost double that of the baseline year (ranging from 25% to 49%).

Prior to returning to in-person learning in the spring semester of 2020-21, the district was recording 100% attendance for remote learning (according to an interview with the outgoing project director in January 2021.) When the district provided in-person learning in a pandemic environment, lengthy school absences were often required or recommended due to a student's mild physical symptoms of possible illness (such as a headache or a runny nose) although these same symptoms might not have resulted in a single missed period of school in pre-pandemic times. For these reasons, the evaluators have reservations regarding the use of attendance data as a measure of student engagement in the pandemic environment of the project's last three years.

Table 3: Aggregated Percent of Military-connected Students with Problematic Attendance

	Total in District	Tanana Middle School	North Pole Middle School	North Pole High School	Lathrop High School	Ben Eielson Jr. High School	Ben Eielson Sr. High School
2017-18	17%	14%	20%	20%	23%	12%	15%
2018-19	17%	23%	25%	25%	27%	13%	19%
2019-20	10%	7%	10%	18%	16%	6%	7%
2020-21	7%	6%	6%	7%	14%	4%	7%
2021-22	*35%*	*28%*	*38%*	*49%*	*48%*	*25%*	*28%*

Districtwide, the percent of military dependent high school students who meet or exceed college readiness benchmarks in Math decreased from 53% to 23% on the MAP assessments (9th-10th grade) but increased from 39% to 40% on the ACT assessments (11th-12th grade). At all three of the project's high schools, the percent of 9th and 10th graders who met or exceeded college readiness benchmarks in math decreased from baseline. The percent of 11th and 12th graders who met or exceeded college readiness benchmarks in math decreased from baseline at one high school and increased at the other two high schools. At Lathrop High School, the number of 11th and 12th grade students meeting ACT benchmarks in Math did increase by more than the projects' target of 20% from baseline. See Table 4 for the specific school results.

Table 4: Aggregated Percentage of Military Dependent Students That Meet or Exceed College Readiness Benchmarks in Math

	Total in District	North Pole High	Lathrop High	Ben Eielson Sr. High
2017-18 Baseline Aggregated Percentage of Military Dependent students that meet or exceed college readiness benchmarks on *MAP Math assessments (9th and 10th Grade)*	53%	39%	41%	50%
2021-22 Aggregated Percentage of Military Dependent students that meet or exceed college readiness benchmarks on *MAP Math assessments (9th and 10th Grade)*	23%	13%	17%	31%
2017-18 Baseline Aggregated Percentage of Military Dependent students that meet or exceed college readiness benchmarks on *ACT Math tests (11th and 12th graders)*	39%	39%	15%	90%
2021-22 Aggregated Percentage of Military Dependent students that meet or exceed college readiness	40%	50%	60%	25%

benchmarks on *ACT Math tests (11th and 12th graders)*				

*MAP: Measures of Academic Progress

Districtwide, the percent of military dependent high school students who meet or exceed college readiness benchmarks in Language Arts has increased from 62% to 64% on the MAP assessments (9th-10th grade) and increased from 59% to 67% on the ACT assessments (11th-12th grade). The percent of 9th and 10th graders who met or exceeded college readiness benchmarks in Language Arts increased from baseline at two of the project's high schools and decreased at the other one. The percent of 11th and 12th graders who met or exceeded college readiness benchmarks in Language Arts also increased from baseline at two of the project's high schools and decreased at the other one. At North Pole High School and Lathrop High School, the number of 11th and 12th grade students meeting ACT benchmarks in Language Arts did increase by more than the projects' target of 20% from baseline. See Table 5 for the specific school results.

Table 5: Aggregated Percentage of Military Dependent Students
That Meet or Exceed College Readiness Benchmarks in Language Arts

	Total in District	North Pole High	Lathrop High	Ben Eielson Sr. High
2017-18 Baseline Aggregated Percentage of Military Dependent students that meet or exceed district averages on *MAP Reading assessments (9th and 10th Grade)*	62%	58%	54%	67%
2021-22 Aggregated Percentage of Military Dependent students that meet or exceed district averages on *MAP Reading assessments (9th and 10th Grade)*	64%	50%	59%	80%
2017-18 Baseline Aggregated Percentage of Military Dependent students that meet or exceed college readiness benchmarks on *ACT English Language Arts tests (11th and 12th graders)*	59%	46%	55%	80%
2021-22 Aggregated Percentage of Military Dependent students that meet or exceed college readiness benchmarks on *ACT English Language Arts tests (11th and 12th graders)*	67%	100%	80%	50%

*MAP: Measures of Academic Progress

At each of the project DIPLOMAS schools, the three project strategies were implemented with fidelity. All planned activities were completed, with pandemic-related modifications where necessary.

Strategy 1: Provide increased virtual learning opportunities (online learning, blended learning, flipped classrooms) to increase student engagement. Between the activities of this grant and the district's Covid-19 response of universal remote learning, 100% of students had participated in virtual learning by the end of the grant period. The grant successfully implemented this strategy through the completion of activities to support the increase in online and blended learning that all students experienced. Prior to the pandemic, through concerted efforts and collaboration within the school district, the number of professional development opportunities for the effective utilization of digital content, online learning, blended learning, and flipped classrooms increased threefold within the first two project years. As part of the district's COVID mitigation plan, all students spent more than half the 2020-21 school year in a remote learning status, which coincidentally aligned with this project's goal of providing increased virtual learning opportunities. The PD worked with school principals to identify and address students' evolving needs in the midst of COVID-related distance delivery and hybrid learning models.

A total of 86 teachers responded to a survey sent to all teachers at the project schools in February of 2020 (halfway through the second year of project implementation). At that time, 44% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the survey question that stated: "*My access to professional development opportunities for virtual learning, blended learning and flipped learning methods has increased* **between February 2019-February 2020**." For comparison, 45% of the teachers responded neutrally to this survey question while only 11% of the teachers responded disagree or strongly disagree.

A follow-up survey was provided in January of 2022 (halfway through the fourth year of project implementation) to teachers who had worked directly with the project by collaborating with an SLC at their school. Of the 15 teachers who responded, 47% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the survey question that stated, "*My access to professional development opportunities for virtual learning (e.g. online learning, blended learning, and flipped classroom learning methods) has increased* **since February 2020.**" For comparison, 47% of the teachers responded neutrally to this survey question while only 7% of the teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Strategy 2: Provide increased in-class support via access to digital content for more personalized learning experiences to increase student engagement. Students' access to digital content for more personalized learning experiences expanded throughout the grant period. This expanded access was the combined result of this grant's activities and the district's expansion of technology resources through its ongoing personalized learning initiative and its pandemic motivated implementation of virtual and hybrid learning.

Over the five years of the grant, the DIPLOMAS project provided a total of 1,810 Chromebooks to project schools. These devices provided students with access to digital content for more personalized learning experiences. To ensure the devices were used as the grant intended, the PD met with each school's principal to develop school-specific plans for implementing the DIPLOMAS project, with an intentional focus on college and career readiness. The plans were reviewed annually with each of the principals to update their school's needs and to discuss activities related to the grant's goals and objectives.

As a result of the 1:1 device to student ratio and the increased access to digital content, one teacher stated, "In my observation, missing work has decreased. Students are more likely to complete their assignments, at least partially, due to having 24/7 access to most things through our various online learning platforms. Learning is able to more smoothly continue if a student is absent or if I am absent because of the online learning platforms. Google Classroom makes things more organized."

Strategy 3: Provide tutoring to increase the academic support for the student's personalized learning before, during or after the traditional school day. Tutoring was provided by Student Learning Coaches (SLCs) at each school provided in-class support to help students access digital technology, and this was done virtually in Google Classrooms when the district was in a remote learning status and in person when the district was providing in-person learning. The SLCs worked an average of 12 hours per week during the school year.

The DIPLOMAS project provided tutoring by funding the following number of Student Learning Coaches at each school:
- Tanana Middle School: 2 SLCs
- Lathrop High School: 2 SLCs
- North Pole Middle School: 2 SLCs
- Ben Eielson Jr/Sr High School: 3 SLCs
- North Pole High School: 2 SLCs

The PD worked continuously with school administrators to plan the best way to utilize the SLCs, starting with collaboratively developing school-specific plans for implementing the DIPLOMAS project. To ensure that the target population was identified and received tutoring from the SLCs, the PD collaborated with the district's statistician to make certain that the right students were being identified with the correct parameters. The PD worked with the evaluation team, grant administration and the statistician to make certain that the appropriate military connected students were targeted and were receiving services as written in the grant. The SLCs were then provided access to and trained on PowerSchool in order to identify military connected students at their own school site to target them for academic tutoring in math and language arts. Through this process each SLC had a "military student focus list" that directed them to the targeted students. SLCs could then assist teachers in providing the skills, habits and content knowledge for students to be college and career ready.

SLCs worked collaboratively and creatively to respond to each school site's particular needs. One SLC created a site called Tanana Tutorials to increase virtual learning opportunities and populated it with trainings on topics such as Digital Citizenship, G-Suite Applications, and available resources for AI tutoring such as Khan Academy, Gale Science etc.

Training and support were both key in preparing the SLCs to support students' college and career readiness. The PD offered SLCs several professional development opportunities each year and performed onsite one-on-one professional development with each SLC at their school. On a quarterly basis, the PD pulled all the SLCs together for training and collaborative discussions. Before Covid-19 and beginning again in April 2021, once Covid mitigations allowed for it, the PD also performed site visits to observe the SLCs in action and provide feedback and additional resources as needed.

SLCs received professional development on how to best support the utilization of technology in both classroom and tutoring settings. The selection of the professional development was guided by the Executive Director of Teaching and Learning and school district goals and

objectives. Individual and small group trainings were held for SLCs on how to utilize the Chromebooks in order to access district resources and information for tutoring. The SLCs were also provided training in how to utilize district supported online/virtual materials which included Google Classroom, Power School Learning, and now PowerSchool Unified. The PD trained the SLCs on PowerSchool Admin to properly identify the students who would benefit most from various tutoring services. SLCs learned how to search and sort through grades, attendance records and assignments in PowerSchool to provide additional targeted instruction in Math and English Language Arts (ELA).

Prior to the pandemic, SLC efforts to address college and career readiness were focused on core subject tutoring and in-class support in math and language arts classrooms. While in the first years of implementation, efforts were made to avoid drifting into other academic areas and social-emotional needs, this changed during and after the Covid-19 shutdowns. One adaptation to the needs of the schools in the pandemic conditions was training the SLCs in how to tutor students and work collaboratively with teachers in a virtual learning environment using Google Classroom and other virtual learning resources.

When students returned to in-person learning, they were "not prepared for real school" according to the PD. SLCs spent time helping students with organization, school lockers, and various barrier-removal activities. The SLCs reported that students were more willing to come to them for academic assistance if they had first connected by providing these non-academic supports. The SLCs made concerted efforts to get to know all the students in the classrooms (if not the schools) with a particular emphasis on getting to identify, know and develop relationships with the military dependent students. The SLCs reported that relationship-building with the students led to more students asking directly for help and greater success in their academic support efforts.

This grant was focused on college and career readiness of military connected students. Because of this focus, the PD and the SLCs initially worked within the school record management system, PowerSchool, to identify and find military dependent students that might need extra support to move from a lower to middle grade to a higher, passing grade. The schools worked to leverage the various supports from each of the programs and grants in the schools so that students with specific needs were directed to the appropriate support program. This approach was intended to ensure that the SLC's focus would remain on those students that would show immediate benefits vs. long term remediation/academic support.

After returning to in-person learning following three quarters of remote learning during COVID, the needs were so great and the resources so few that SLCs were pulled in all directions. They were no longer focused on those students who could show immediate benefits, but continued to work with the teachers to identify any student that was in need of tutoring support in math and language arts. What remained consistent throughout the life of the grant was that the SLCs regularly checked the student data management system as well as observed in classrooms to identify students that might benefit from extra academic support and motivation.

At the end of the fall semester of the final project year, students who had been served by SLCs were asked about the impact of "access to technology, online learning resources, digital content, virtual learning opportunities, and tutoring" on students, 51% said it made students more engaged. For comparison, 39% said it made no difference, and 10% said it made students less engaged.

One teacher commented in the January 2022 survey, "I believe that the tutoring has helped my students. They feel comfortable asking the tutor for assistance, sometimes more than myself." Additionally, the SLCs were seen and utilized as an asset during a transition time with shifts in base and student population at Ben Eielson JR/SR High School (BEHS). As reported by the PD, with military-connected student enrollment increasing due to the arrival of the F35s, Ben Eielson's school leadership recognized and appreciated the extra help provided by the SLCs through the DIPLOMAS grant. The high rotation and population shifts put a lot of stress on the schools. The additional instructional manpower provided by the SLCs helped to ease some of this stress.

The overall impact of the DIPLOMAS project can be further understood through feedback given by principals, teachers, SLCs, and students at the target schools. The remainder of this section of our final evaluation report will provide a sampling of this feedback.

The SLCs completed daily logs of their work with students. The following are some highlights from their comments in those logs:

- "Student who previously was missing several assignments is now current as of today with assignments. The grade for this student went from a D beginning last week to an A as of today."
- "I had two teachers reach out to thank me because they have students that were not present in classes that have started to turn work in and participate since working with me."
- "One student went from a D- to a B with just turning in 4 assignments. So happy and proud."
- "Student that I have worked with over the last three years has grown a lot in class behavior and skills. A once non engaged student is now taking notes and engaged in class work without redirection. Even though grades have not went to straight A's; the improvement is most work turned in eliminating the high number of zero's. Currently passing all classes."
- I had a student show up for Advisory to focus on missing work. Previously student has been avoiding assignments.
- One student I was helping the week before last to get missing assignments turned in changed his grade from a D- to a B! And the other student who we went and organized his billions of papers in his locker went from a F (if I remember correctly) to a B-. Organization for the win!
- I have been working closely with one particular student that has felt lost since the beginning of the year. She was failing 3 of her classes. I have been able to help her get her grade in math from an F to a B+ (possibly an A). I was able to network with counselors to help her negotiate a possible class change and provided accountability to get her to turn in assignments for Art. While Art and Government are not our focus, she does need them for graduation. She has gone from feeling like there was no hope to seeing the light. Also, some days, just providing a quiet space for kids to focus on work has been beneficial in eliminating zeros from their grades.
- We celebrated one of the students who helped build our program from the ground up. When she started, there were only about 5 kids in the room. Now we are moving into a new classroom because we're spilling out into the hallways! :)

- Multiple teachers and staff members reached out and asked me for help with specific students or gave me freedom to pull students from the classroom in the future. Multiple students also asked me to pull them during their advisory period to help them with work. It feels rewarding that I am acknowledged and utilized in the role that I have been given.
- Most of the kids whom I worked with that were really struggling last semester have shown massive improvements this semester!

The project schools' administrators were surveyed in February of 2022 regarding the cumulative impact of the project. There were five administrators (Ben Eielson Junior and Senior High share a building and a principal) surveyed, and three responded. One of the three had been in the administration of two of the project schools over the life of the grant, and responded on behalf of both schools. The fifth administrator was in the process of being replaced for the remainder of the school year.

When asked if computer-based and online learning programs available at their school had increased in quantity and/or quality, the administrators noted that Covid-19 had more of an impact than this project alone.

> *"Our online learning has certainly increased in quantity, and I would like to say quality, however, I think the year 2020, when teachers had to make such a huge shift, the quality was not as good as it is during in-person learning. Computers are a nice addition to learning, and teachers have been honing their skills since!"*
> *"There was a huge impact and increase in computer-based and online learning programs available at both schools. Before COVID, the computers were actively used in classes to add more integration of computer-based and web-based applications/programs to supplement instruction. Math and English were the most heavily impacted prior to COVID. However, once COVID hit, the applications of technology-aided learning went to every curricular course and have continued at various levels now that we are resuming full in-person education again."*
> *"The Covid pandemic certainly speeded up the transition to technology in classrooms when we were forced to go to remote learning. Lathrop changed the policy and issued every student a laptop. Teachers ended up putting all assignments, instructional videos, and materials on the Google Classroom platform… which we continue to use today. Despite the move to technology, student learning has not increased in quantity or quality."*

When asked to compare the number of students accessing devices with internet connectivity before, during, and after school hours in the final semester of the project (Spring 2022) to the first semester of the project (Fall 2017), all the administrators indicated there had been an increase.

> *"There has been a huge increase in access, but students without internet access at home or with limited cellular data at home still see limited access, even with devices. However, some students will still access it as often as they have cellular or web access in various areas. Some students have reported being with a parent shopping and using free wifi access to reading online books or comics while on the weekend."*
> *"Absolutely!"*

> *"Select classrooms had computer carts with laptops before the pandemic. The pandemic forced us to issue every student a laptop. Student use of computers has grown exponentially."*

When asked to compare the number of teachers trained to integrate digital content into personalized learning in the final semester of the project (Spring 2022) to the first semester of the project (Fall 2017), all the administrators indicated there had been an increase.

> *"I believe that absolutely there the number of teachers experienced due to exploration or taking training classes has increased since the fall of 2017. However, I think the biggest catalyst was COVID with schools moving to remote instruction that really made this a necessity versus an interest to use. Afterward, the teachers realized the rewards of adding more technology and have continued to keep most aspects of use in their classrooms. Moreover, some of the expectations of teachers to maintain a virtual classroom for posting more materials versus just keeping up a gradebooks [sic] has also changed as part of our culture with added access to devices and internet access."*

> *"There have been some really good trainings [sic] for teachers, but more are always needed to keep current."*

> *"With the switch to remote learning in 2020, teachers were forced to quickly learn how to use ZOOM and Google Classroom. Because of the need to integrate digital content into Google Classroom, a lot of training took place to train teachers. Currently, every teacher has the ability to post digital content online for students to access."*

Other administrative feedback included:

> *"This grant program has been an amazing opportunity for Tanana Middle School to purchase more Chromebooks at such a crucial time, and the grant has also allowed us to purchase other items to enhance learning! We are so fortunate to have been one of the recipients."*

> *"This grant project has afforded so much to our students in terms of access and support that has helped grant us the ability to increase student access to instruction as well as a higher level of communication and transparency between teachers, students, administration, and parents. In addition, the support of tutors was just an incredible resource for students, parents, and teachers. This provided unique support for tutors to be in the classroom as well as provide one-to-one tutor support for students with tutors that had the unique perspective of having been in the room to know exactly what is expected of our students, which led to better support for students."*

> *"I love the program. Student success is solely based on the quality of the tutor… and their ability to make connections with students. My only wish is that this position morph into 15-25 hours a week to be more effective. I would rather have one 30 hour a week tutor than have two 15 hour a week tutors. I think this would help retain tutors and provide better coverage."*

Teachers also provided feedback on the impact of the project. In the previously mentioned January 2022 teacher survey, 67% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, *"I am more comfortable incorporating virtual learning (e.g. online learning, blended learning, and flipped classroom learning methods) in my classroom because of my participation in building and/or*

district level professional development opportunities." More than 86% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, *"Since February 2020, I have incorporated more technology, online resources, and virtual learning opportunities into my classes."*

Student comments on the survey administered to project participants in December 2021 give us a glimpse into the diverse perspectives of students who experienced virtual learning during Covid-19. One student stated, "I think the use of technology has made me, and other students around me less engaged in learning, because [we] have all the answers at our fingertips, that learning it in school, and going to school in some cases, seems pointless. Although learning how to do essential things by ourselves has become easier, having a teacher combined with technology has backfired. Instead of making school more about learning how to live outside of high school, in the real world, technology has made school more of a "how to get by in life" type of learning. Technology should be used as little as possible in the classroom, or at least, used in a different way than how it is being used now." Another student stated, "I think in some classes we use technology too much and other[s] not enough, in my science class we used the computer so much at some point I was beginning to get a headache and my math class we NEVER use any technology."

Challenges Encountered

The DIPLOMAS project had three major challenges in its five years of funding: delays in the planning year due to difficulty hiring the part-time project director, continuous difficulties filling the SLC positions, and the Covid-19 pandemic. In the planning year (2017-18), hiring the project director was delayed due primarily to a lack of qualified applicants. After nearly five months without a director, an interim was brought on in the spring semester to fulfill planning year activities and milestones.

The primary challenge throughout the four years of implementation was recruiting, hiring, and retaining Student Learning Coaches. Recruiting qualified SLCs was a labor and time intensive challenge for the Project Director. The SLC positions being part-time and non-benefited made the positions less desirable to many potential employees than the multitude of other jobs available in a competitive hiring market. The limit on the number of hours the SLCs could work due to their status as "temporary employees" in the district also influenced the turnover rates of these roles. This staffing challenge was only exacerbated by the pandemic. The PD was only a half-time position, and each of the PDs who worked on this issue over the life of the grant reported to the evaluators that a significant portion of their time was spent in the hiring and training of these high-turnover positions.

Furthermore, the SLC turnover rate limited the hours of tutoring available for students. Each time an SLC was hired, the PD needed to spend a high percentage of their own half-time position's hours providing extensive onboarding training to the new SLC. These onboarding sessions typically focused on FERPA, confidentiality, student boundaries, and scheduling while also serving as a formal introduction to the school site, the school staff, and the DIPLOMAS grant. A great deal of district time and other resources were invested in each SLC hire, with principal or site supervisors usually taking part in the onboarding meetings.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic and the district's response to it presented many challenges for project implementation and required adaptation to the project strategies. In the second year of implementation (2019-20), COVID-19 disrupted schooling in mid-March 2020. The Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, like many across the world, went into spring break uncertain

as to when students would return to school. The school district extended spring break for a few weeks before eventually canceling in-person schooling for the rest of the year. This action resulted in the SLCs being furloughed for the remaining school year.

In the third year of project implementation (2020-21), students in the district began in a remote status, and did not know when they would return to in-person learning. To strategize for the educational adaptations due to Covid-19, the PD was able to share the ways in which the project had already provided the needed Chromebooks for the participating schools as well as the positive results of the SLCs work up to that point, convincing district leadership of the important role SLCs could play in the 2020-21 school year in assisting schools transitioning to and from virtual learning. The district offered only remote learning options, primarily virtual school through Google Classroom, for the first semester, then moved students back to in-person learning in the second half of the 2020-21 school year. Project activities, such as tutoring to increase academic support for students, were delivered virtually through the first half of the school year, and then in person beginning in the second semester when many students (but not all) were able to return to in-person schooling. Thus, students spent more than half the school year in a remote learning status, which coincidentally aligned with this project's goal of providing increased virtual learning opportunities. However, as previously noted, the challenge of recruiting and retaining qualified SLCs to provide tutoring for students was made considerably more difficult by COVID.

Lessons Learned

The single more consistent lesson across all four years of project implementation was that the schools needed SLCs available on site for more hours than the 12-15 hours/week they were limited to through the life of the grant. Multiple principals and teachers as well as the SLCs themselves stated that they would rather have fewer SLCs for more hours than have multiple people filling those positions. The students told the SLCs they needed them to be available daily and the SLCs who were providing in-class academic support said they missed too much content when they missed class sessions due to their not having enough hours available to attend them. The consistent consensus through the life of the grant, across all stakeholders, was that the SLC positions needed to be closer to full time in order to attract and retain good employees and prevent the inefficiencies and constant upheaval of high turnover in these roles.

Sustainability Efforts

Due to this grant, each of the schools that participated in Project DIPLOMAS received a significant number of Chromebooks, enabling them to make the shift to a 1:1 school. Removing the barrier of technology inequities had been a priority for the district in implementing personalized learning, and through this grant the Project DIPLOMAS schools achieved the desired 1:1 student to device ratio. The project provided a total of 1,810 Chromebooks to participating schools, which allowed students access to digital content for more personalized learning experiences. Through the course of this project, the students were able to take Chromebooks home to utilize and engage in online learning. With the device purchases made in the grant's final year, the schools will be able to sustain the 1:1 ratio beyond the life of the grant. Thanks to this project, the district also now has teachers with experience collaborating with academic support staff using online tools, which is a sustainable element that may serve the district well in future virtual learning environments.

A sustainable method that has emerged due to this grant is the management system created for tracking the SLCs time. With six sites and vastly different schedules for the SLCs, the PD implemented a virtual management system in which the SLCs logged their time, issues, and comments. The SLCs input short notes on what they focused on for the day/week that can be reviewed by the project coordinator. The system was used to document student contact hours and support provided through the tutors and therefore the grant and were easily shared at grant coordination meetings and with other stakeholders. This virtual management system assisted the PD in prioritizing site visits, identifying possible professional development needs and tracking time expenditures for the SLCs when the PD was not able to be on site. Since the SLCs were defined by the district as temporary staff, they were therefore exempt from evaluation; this virtual management system provided an alternate way to obtain and provide feedback on the SLCs efforts. The PD stated in an interview that the virtual management system and the SLC's log entries helped ensure that the goals of the grant were the focus of the work.

Recommendations for Future Grantees and/or DoDEA

For the first four years of the DIPLOMAS grant, several school sites were co-located with another DODEA grant, Project 360, which focused on social and emotional support for military connected students. Together, these two grants complemented one another and worked to provide a greater safety net for students. District and school leaders repeatedly commented to the evaluators about the positive impact evident in the schools that benefited from both academic and social-emotional support programs. The district and DoDEA can move forward knowing that it is possible and even preferable to implement two such distinctly focused programs simultaneously.

It is further recommended that the role of Student Learning Coaches be considered a full time position in any future iterations of similar projects. Positive impact of the SLCs during both in-person learning and periods of remote instruction was consistently reported by students, teachers, principals, and the SLCs themselves, despite continuous turnover and limited hours which were believed to limit their effectiveness.

It should also be noted that the provision of student Chromebooks was critical in the project's efforts to increase college and career readiness by promoting expanded personalized learning opportunities through virtual learning experiences and integrated digital content. The project's emphasis on 1:1 devices for students and use of in-class technology supports for academic learning became even more important in those periods of the grant years that were spent in a remote learning status due to the district area's high rate of community transmission of Covid-19. Even after the school district reopened for in-person learning, the dependence on technology in instruction was far greater than it had been in the prior years, as many students continued to participate remotely in some classes. With this project's support, good digital content helped teachers differentiate and target instruction, as well as provide timely feedback.