Dropout Prevention in Middle & High Schools: Moving from Research into Practice

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In today’s Session

• Part 1 - Describe impactful interventions and strategies associated with school completion for students with disabilities

• Part 2 -
  ▫ Discuss a framework for intervening at the local level using The Dropout Prevention Intervention Framework
  ▫ Identify Resources for moving forward
Challenges We Face

• Chronic absenteeism, missing more than 10 percent of the school year, for any reason, is an early indicator of potential dropout.

• Middle grades are pivotal years, setting a student on a path to high school, college and career, or a path to disengagement and low achievement in key subjects.
Challenges We Face

• There are more than six million people between the ages of 18 and 24 who currently are not in school, in possession of a high school diploma or working.

• Success in life cannot just come from a classroom education. Students need to develop additional skills, such as self-awareness and self-control, and collaboration and conflict resolution.
What Can Be Done

- Awareness
- Accountability
- Action
  - Targeted reform in secondary schools
  - Targeted interventions
  - Closing the opportunity gap
  - Building sustainable systems
Recommendations from Past Research

- Diagnostic processes for identifying student-level and school wide dropout issues

- Targeted interventions for a subset of middle and high school students who are identified as at risk for dropping out

- School wide reforms designated to enhance engagement
Targeted Interventions

- Caring Adult Advocates
- Academic Support & Enrichment
- Improvement in Behavior and Social Skills
School wide Reforms

- Personalized Learning Environments/Processes
- Rigorous and relevant instruction in academic and career skills
What we Learned

• Use your district and school data systems to learn about your school and students
• Use a continuum of tiered interventions to address risk in academics and behavior
• Adults matter in youth’s lives
• Instruction must be relevant, rigorous and engaging
What We Know About Patterns of Risk

- Freshmen with 0–4 absences in a 90-day grading period have a greater than 80% rate of graduation, while freshman with 10–14 absences in the same period graduate at a 40% rate.

- Freshmen with no course failures have a greater than 80% chance of graduating, while those with two failures have a 55% graduation rate, and those with four failures have a 30% rate.
What We Know About Patterns of Risk

- Freshmen with a GPA of 3.5 or higher have a nearly 100% graduation rate, while those with a 2.0 GPA have a 70% rate and those with a 1.0 have a 30% rate.

- Sixth-grade students who fail math or English, have an 80% or lower attendance rate, or earn an unsatisfactory behavior grade have just a 10–20% likelihood of graduating high school in five years.
Key Risk Indicators

- Student absences,
- Grade retention
- Low academic achievement
- Behavior
- Family Engagement
- School Climate
- Critical transition points

• Where to Now?
Why Measure Risk

- Regularly analyzing student data is the critical first step:
  - for determining the scope of the dropout problem (Root Cause Analysis)
  - identifying the specific students who are at risk of dropping out and should be considered for extra services or supports (Early Warning).

- Programs designed to target students at risk of dropping out need a way to identify the population they wish to serve (Delineation of level of risk).
Implement increasingly intensive evidence-based methodologies toward improved academic outcomes in core academic areas

- Tutoring/individual instruction
- Study skills and test-taking classes
- Individual or small group instruction in reading and core academic areas
- Extra instruction/credit recovery through flexible schedules, Saturday school, after-school, or summer programs
- Self-paced online programs
Implement increasingly intensive evidence based methodologies toward improved academic outcomes in core academic areas

- Provide academic content in a variety of formats: online or blended learning options
- Providing strategy instruction that teaches students self-regulation, adaptability, and to be more strategic in their learning. Example: Teaching how to use planner for time management; think aloud .....
Implement increasingly intensive evidence based methodologies to improve social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes

- Promote knowledge or skills related to the self management, self awareness, relationship skills, and decision making
- Create positive learning environments that are safe, caring, engaging, and participatory
- Improve student attitudes and beliefs about self, others, and school.
Promote the implementation of attendance strategies and alternative programs

- Welcome students as they enter school
- Recognize good and improved attendance
- Engage students and parents
- Monitor attendance data
Promote the implementation of attendance strategies and alternative programs to increase the likelihood that students will attend school regularly

- Provide early personalized outreach
  - Place calls home each day that a student is absent
  - Include attendance on report cards and in report card conferences
  - Integrate information about chronic absence into parent programs and communications throughout the year
  - Assign an attendance buddy
  - Recruit students for engaging afterschool activities
  - Ensure continued regular and positive contact with the family

» [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)
Promote the implementation of attendance strategies and alternative programs to increase the likelihood that students will attend school regularly

- Identify/ Remove barriers to attendance-
  - Identify barriers to attendance, such as health, transportation or housing
  - Involve public agencies and community partners and resources as needed to address barriers to attendance
  - Involve the school nurse with follow-up on medical related absences
  - Provide families with information on community resources that can help overcome barriers
  - Connect families with school-based resources that can support good attendance
Provide rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning both academic and career skills.

Academic:

- Presenting academic content using a combination of words and graphics to assist with learning. Example: Graphic organizers
- Using computers to assist with and improve academic performance. Example: Computer-based instruction
Provide rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning both academic and career skills.

- **Mnemonics** - connects new information with prior knowledge using visual and acoustic cues such as a keyword method
- **Using peers to assist other students with academic instruction**. Examples: Cooperative learning, peer tutoring
Provide rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning both academic and career skills.

- Career Skills - Tying career related courses with academic courses
- Student take classes organized around specific career pathways
- Career exploration - Providing opportunities for students with disabilities to explore careers in a variety of settings
Promote and ensure culturally responsive learning environments and instructional practices

- Create an environment that encourages and embraces culture
- Allow students ample opportunities to share their cultural knowledge
- Question and challenge students on their beliefs and actions
- Teach students to question and challenge their own beliefs and actions

According to the research, teaching that ignores student norms of behavior and communication provokes student resistance, while teaching that is responsive prompts student involvement (Olneck 1995).
Promote and ensure culturally responsive learning environments and instructional practices

• Collaborative teaching - cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, peer teaching, reciprocal teaching

• Responsive feedback - teachers offer critical, ongoing, and immediate feedback regarding students' responses and participation in a manner sensitive to students’ individual and cultural preferences
Promote and ensure culturally responsive learning environments and instructional practices

- Modeling explicit discussion of instructional expectations, providing appropriate examples based on students’ cultural, linguistic, and lived experiences.

- Instructional Scaffolding - open ended questions, analytic questions, providing appropriate wait time; use of supporting instructional materials
Promote and ensure culturally responsive learning environments and instructional practices

• Visit the communities of the students to find out how they interact and learn in that environment
• Ask students about their learning preferences
• Interview parents about how and what students learn from them
• Devise and implement different ways for students to be successful in achieving developmental milestones
• Ensure success by setting realistic, yet rigorous, goals for individual students
• Allow students to set their own goals for a project
• Allow the use of the student's first language to enhance learning
Provide options for students with disabilities to engage in supported employment and work based learning

- Classes focused on employability skills across a variety of occupations
- Occupationally specific programming in a trade
- Training in related skills such as computer literacy, job seeking, and workplace behavior
- On-the-job training for which students can earn credits
- Career days at which students can gain information from local employers and post secondary institutions
Interpersonal Skills
Self Determination

- Decision making
- Problem solving
- Goal setting
- Self-advocacy
- Leadership skills
- Self-management
- Self-regulation
Interpersonal Skills
Social Skills

• Meeting people
• Conflict management
• Active listening
• Starting conversations
• Appropriate body language, gestures, and facial expressions
Interpersonal Skills
Life Skills

- Conflict management
- Social skills
- Goal setting
- Leisure skills
- Self-advocacy
- Community participation
- Job-seeking skills
Prepare Students for the World Beyond High School

- Provide opportunities for students to apply their learning in relevant, real world situations that help them see connections to their futures.

- Create systems that promote activities and services to facilitate accomplishment of post secondary goals, including career awareness activities and work experiences during high school.

- Create structured partnerships between school and employers – designate a full time liaison when possible.
Embrace a philosophy of partnerships that empowers families, communities, and other stakeholders.

- Conduct home visits to develop relationships with family members
- Provide transportation or arrange carpooling to school events
- Offer to meet parents in locations that are convenient for them
- Provide assistance for parents in reinforcing classroom instruction and providing behavioral support at home
Embrace a philosophy of partnerships that empowers families, to become meaningfully involved

- Communicate with families
  - calls, email, school website, distribute flyers at school events
  - positive phone calls home to families
  - student designed monthly newsletter to share information with families

- Provide incentives to families for attending events
  - Provide food at events
  - Create a raffle for families
  - Free portraits
Embrace a philosophy of partnerships that empowers families

Create a welcoming environment

- Provide school information in family’s home languages
- Bulletin board at the front of the school with positive information about student’s accomplishments
- Invite parents to sit in or volunteer in classes
Promote and Provide for the assignment of caring adult advocates

- Monitor students’ attendance - Follow up with absences daily
- Communicate with families and teachers
- Maintain ongoing communication through notes, text messages, emails, and phone calls
- Check homework completion

Research on mentoring indicates that even informal relationships with caring adults can increase the likelihood that students with disabilities will graduate
Promote and Provide for the assignment of caring adult advocates

- Arrange for tutoring and social services
- Maintain a list of current contacts and develop relationships with local service providers
- Help students establish postsecondary and career goals
- Share brochures, take students on college visits, bring in guest speakers from local industries
- Provide additional time and support in school for students to complete homework
Promote the development of personalized learning environments that creates a sense of belonging and fosters a positive school climate

• Create small learning communities
• Show an interest in students on a personal level
• Focus on the development of peer relationships
• Encourage students to participate in school activities
Promote the development of personalized learning environments ….

- Use instructional techniques that emphasize the relevance of classroom learning (Southern Regional Education, 2011; Wilkins, 2011a)
- Provide opportunities for engagement in service learning
  - 80% of at-risk students said they would have more positive feelings towards high school if they were involved in service learning opportunities. – (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Wulsin, & Stuart, 2008)
Personalize the learning environment

- Small Learning Communities
- Team Teaching
- Smaller Classes
- Extended Learning Time
- Career Academies
- Extracurricular Activities
- etc.
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Break
Encouraging Connectedness

- Conduct a survey with non-active students. Ask what types of activities they would like and participate in at their school.
- Survey staff to see if they have hobbies or skills they would like to share.
- Create opportunities for non-active students to have a voice in school decisions.
- Have staff **personally encourage** students to participate in activities (not just during PA or advisory announcements).
Encouraging Connectedness

- Seek organizations that offer activities to students during and/or after school
- Create jobs or responsibilities in the school for which students can be rewarded
- Reach out to parents and engage them in sharing talents with students. Seek collaborations with local colleges.
- Create interest groups
- Start intramural sports leagues
Strategies That Help

- New students can be assigned to older peers who act as mentors and help to allay fears or answer questions about school procedures and the daily routine.

- Welcoming activities (e.g., picnic, orientation, team building activities, parent meetings) at the beginning of the school year helps to create supportive environments.

- Staff members make brief home visits before school starts to help establish connections with students and their families.
Strategies That Help

- Assigning students to small cohort groups within a larger grade level
  - These student cohorts remain together for homeroom as well as core classes (i.e., mathematics, English) and help to create a sense of community.

- Homeroom teachers as “Advisories”
  - tracking attendance,
  - following up with parents about any absences,
  - increasing communication between home and school.
Strategies that Increase Family Engagement

- Conduct home visits to develop relationships with family members
- Provide transportation or arrange car-pooling to school events and offer to meet parents in locations that are convenient for them
- Provide assistance for parents in reinforcing classroom instruction and providing behavioral support for their children at home
- Contact parents with positive information about their children and thank them for their support
Ninth-Grade Transitions

• Use current high school students as mentors for incoming freshman
• Hold a freshman class orientation while students are in middle school
• Institute summer programs at the high school to increase students’ academic skills, orient them to the layout of the school, and enable them to meet high school teachers
Ninth-Grade Transitions

• Address the instructional needs of students who enter high school unprepared for rigorous academic work

• Personalize the learning environment through small class sizes, a freshman academy, mentoring programs, or student participation in school activities
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A Framework for Action
NDPC–SD DROPOUT PREVENTION

Intervention Framework

Phase 1: Develop State and Local Leadership Teams

Phase 2: Analyze Data

Phase 3: Identify Target Areas for Intervention

Phase 4: Develop Improvement Plan

Phase 5: Implement, Monitor, and Evaluate
NDPC-SD DPIF

- Promotes the facilitation of evidence based strategies that promote and/or increase:
  - a positive school climate
  - regular school attendance
  - appropriate positive [prosocial] behaviors
  - academic competence & success
  - parent engagement
  - student engagement
Successful Framework

- Who is dropping out and why?
- Selection of interventions based on data
- Relationship & Team Building
- Coaching & Fidelity Checks
- System and School support of project
- Celebration of Success
Using the Framework

- What is working?
- What do I need to change?
- Did I reach my target?

- Who drops out and Why?

- What are the critical gaps to address?
- What EBPs best address the need?
- What is my plan of action?

Implement, Monitor and Evaluate

Analyze Data

Select Matching Interventions and Develop Action Plan

Identify and Prioritize Needs
Phase 1: Develop a School Team

- Get administrative buy-in!
- Conscript the right people
  - Administrator (not as team leader)
  - Special Ed staff
  - Regular Ed staff
  - Curriculum specialist
  - Data specialist
  - School counselor
Phase 2: Analyze Data

- District and school demographics
- Student performance (graduation, dropout, course completion, AYP)
- District/school infrastructure
- Assessment, curriculum and instructional systems
- Current initiatives and partnerships
- Professional development
- Parent/family engagement
Phase 3: Identify Target Areas for Intervention

- Academic content and instruction (reading, math, science, writing)
- Behavior (classroom management, behavior supports)
- Attendance and truancy prevention
- School climate
- Self management (self determination, problem solving)
- Mentoring (employment, service learning)
- Parent/Family engagement
General Practices Related to Dropout Prevention

- Comprehensive diagnostic data systems
- Early warning systems
- Provide rigorous and relevant instruction
- Provide academic support
- Provide personalized instruction and learning
- Instruction on behavior and social skills
- Supportive school climate
Phase 4: Develop An Improvement Plan

- Select evidence-based practices (e.g., Check & Connect, Positive Behavior Support, Cognitive Behavior Interventions, Content Enhancements)
- Determine level of intensity (Universal, Selected, Targeted)
- Contextualize to setting
- Establish timelines
- Train relevant staff members
- Establish early warning system
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Indicator</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Risk Threshold (Flagged)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre–High School Indicators</td>
<td>Prior to the start of school</td>
<td>Exhibited locally validated indicators of risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>First 20 (or 30) days, end of each grading period, end of year</td>
<td>Missed 10% or more of instructional time (absences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Failures</td>
<td>End of each grading period, end of year</td>
<td>Failed one or more courses (any subject) per semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>End of 2.0 on a 4-point each grading period, end of year</td>
<td>end of year Achieved 2.0 or lower (on a scale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSR End of Year (On-Track) Indicator</td>
<td>End of year</td>
<td>Failed 2+ core courses, or accumulated fewer credits than needed for promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Semester</td>
<td>3 plus, 1+ resulting in ISS or OSS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase 5: Implement, Monitor and Evaluate

- Conduct baseline measures
- Implement strategies: on-site coaching, consultation & feedback, progress monitoring, fidelity checks
- Measure results
- Evaluate outcomes
- Celebrate success!
- Disseminate
Final Thoughts

Overcoming dropout requires breakthrough thinking.

However, knowledge alone does not translate into action.
Thank You

• Suggested additional Resources
  ▫ [www.every1graduates.org](http://www.every1graduates.org)
  ▫ [www.attendanceworks.org](http://www.attendanceworks.org)
  ▫ [www.Transitionta.org](http://www.Transitionta.org)

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