Comprehensive District/School Dropout Prevention Plans

Guidance Document

Creating a Vision

A serious dropout problem exists both nationally and in our local communities. This problem is not confined to the high school population, but exists among our younger population in middle schools as well. The West Virginia Department of Education is concerned about the number of students who choose to leave school and is committed to developing ways to help young people stay in school and provide them with the support they need to be successful. When students drop out of school, there are negative consequences not only with their academic and co-curricular activities, but also with their emotional, physical, mental, and social development, and the ability to live a productive life. There is also an impact on the entire local community when students drop out of school.

Over the next three to five years, The West Virginia Department of Education will maintain a steadfast focus on the three goals of the West Board of Education. One of those goals being: to graduate all students from high school prepared for post-secondary education and career success through personalized pathways and guidance that focus students on productive and satisfying lives. WVDE plans will be clearly aligned to the goals and structured around the following strategic priorities:

- ✓ To meet the personal needs of each student.
- ✓ To elevate the importance of great teachers and learning.
- ✓ To make improvement of public education a moral imperative of every citizen and stakeholder.
- ✓ To accelerate innovation and transform school to meet Global 21 demands.

Purpose of Local Solution Dropout Prevention & Recovery Innovation Zone Act:

Create a fund to support collaborative, local solutions to the dropout problem.
1. Increase graduation rates and reduce the number of dropouts from WV schools.

2. Provide school and communities with opportunities for greater collaboration to plan and implement systemic approaches that include evidence-based solutions.

3. Provide a testing ground for innovative graduation programs, incentives and approaches.

4. Provide information regarding the effects of specific innovations, collaborations and policies on dropout prevention and recovery.

5. Document educational strategies that increase graduation rates.

When local leaders begin to work together to tackle a community problem, they are often able to find innovative solutions that someone from outside the community might not have seen. Unfortunately, they do not always have the resources they need to implement their solutions.

The West Virginia National Governor's Association Dropout Prevention Grant Taskforce proposed the creation of Local Solutions Graduation Fund that schools and communities can apply to for funding for projects that increase their high school graduation rates. Because school dropout is a community issue and not just a school issue, we recommend that applications should be made by schools in partnership

with community groups or other state agencies. Encouraging communities to develop collaborative solutions to their local dropout problem will spur innovation at the local level and strengthen relationships between schools, community groups and the other agencies that work with dropouts. We further recommend that the grantee share data on successful programs so that other communities in West Virginia can benefit from the best practices that they develop.

What is a vision for the future?

High school dropouts are everyone's concern. Schools do not solely own this problem and they cannot solve it alone. Dropping out of high school has significant negative consequences for the individual and society. The cost of doing little or nothing about high school dropouts is enormous, while the investments in dropout prevention promise significant benefits. Dropouts:

- ✓ Hurt the nation's competitive edge.

- ✓ Are prevalent in some rapidly growing racial/ethnic groups.

- ✓ Earn less and contribute fewer tax dollars to the economy.

- ✓ Have increased health costs.

- ✓ Drive up criminal justice costs.

- ✓ Draw heavily on welfare and public assistance.

- ✓ Are less likely to vote or engage in civic activities.

What do we want to change?

If dropouts are everyone's concern, then enlisting allies outside of the education community is important and necessary in reducing dropout rates. These include business and industry, governors, mayors, state legislators, public health and welfare agencies, the justice system, faith-based organizations and other community organizations.

The intent of this grant is to cause local communities to take action by working in coalitions, creating partnerships, hosting community conversations and ultimately creating comprehensive dropout prevention plans. The Education Alliance of WV and the WV Center for Civic Life provide resources and training to organize community dialogues and follow-up action.

We must recognize that solving the dropout crisis may involve nothing short of community and school transformation. Comprehensive school reform, which focuses on every aspect of the school, may be required to change the future.

If simply adding a new program is your plan, but you have no vision of how things are going to be done or run different or organized different or administered different than likely in the end nothing will be different, you will still have student's dropping out of school.

It is important to reach out to stakeholders who stand to benefit from school and community transformation, including groups interested in educational excellence, economic growth, social justice, youth development, crime reduction and rural prosperity.

Involve civic institutions that end up bearing the cost of the dropout problem. Encourage them to take ownership in a local plan to address the dropout problem. Be sure to include businesses, civic groups, advocacy groups, law enforcement, health care, social service providers and neighborhood organizations.

The Importance of Data

It is important to first understand the dropout challenge in the local community. Any actions that communities want to take should be grounded in answers to some key questions, such as:

1. Which students are most at risk of dropping out?

2. When are students dropping out?

3. Who do students drop out?

4. Which schools did students attend prior to dropping out?

To help local communities better understand and tackle their dropout challenge, they can:

✓ Use longitudinal, student-level data on attendance behavior, and academic performance to gather accurate information on the number of students who drop out, identify students who are at the most risk of dropping out before they reach key academic transitions points, and identify events in student's lives outside of school that increase their risk of dropping out.

✓ Urge schools to assess students' sense of engagement and belonging to the school.

✓ Gather information about the school climate or nature of teacher-student interactions to help schools identify potential drop outs.

✓ Diligently seek accurate information about why students dropped out. Often there is little information available or documented about student's withdrawals and why they left school.

✓ Collect information about schools in a district with high dropout rates. These schools may be, unknowingly, organized in ways that contribute to rather than reduce dropout rates.

What data is important?

Data can be accessed from a variety of sources. The following data will help to support the need for your dropout plans:

✓ Attendance rates of students

✓ Discipline records

✓ Course failures

✓ Retentions

✓ Over age and under credit students

✓ ACT Explore and Plan results

✓ ACT Composite Scores

- ✓ College Going Rates

- ✓ Dropout trends

- ✓ Graduation trends

- ✓ Dropout Prevention through Early Warning Indicators: A Current Distribution in West Virginia Schools

    - o The Full Report
      https://www.wvhepc.org/resources/Drop_Out_Prevention_Report.pdf

    - o The District Information
      https://www.wvhepc.org/resources/Drop_Out_Prevention_Report_Appendix_A.pdf

    - o NGA State Stakeholder Recommendation
      https://www.wvhepc.org/resources/Recommendations_from_NGA_Planning_Grant.pdf

Engaging Community Partners

Additional strategy recommendations from the West Virginia National Governor's Association Taskforce include: *supporting local problem solving and emphasizing collaboration*. The people who will do the hard work of solving this problem are the teachers, parents, administrators and community members on the ground. While dropout is tightly linked to attendance, behavior, and course performance, the ways in which those problems manifest, as well as the potential solutions that are available, are different in each community. For communities to develop solutions that meet their specific needs, we believe that collaboration of the entire community is essential.

Working together on this grant has helped create lines of communication between higher education, K-12 administration, county school boards, parent teacher organizations, the business community and non-profit groups. Dropout is a community issue, and the only way to solve the problem is to make sure that representatives from all major groups are at the table when solutions are developed. The task force for this grant has found that bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders, all of whom have a stake in solving the dropout problem, and looking for areas where we can work together, has been very beneficial.

Conducting Community Dialogues

Creating and maintaining community dialogues, is a strategy that many educators have not been sufficiently trained to perform. A Community Action Guide has been developed by the Education Alliance of West Virginia and the West Virginia Center for Civic Life to help educators and other community members create community dialogues around dropout prevention. This guide is intended for communities that want their young people to remain in school and on track for high school completion and to assist educator leaders in engaging and partner with community members. Use the guide as a tool—make it work for you and your group. The goal is to have community members united in purpose and actions to significantly increase the number of students who graduate on time from high school and who are college and/or career ready. The guide can help communities figure out what is needed, from whom, for whom, and how quickly.

When involving stakeholders it is important to:

- ✓ Conceptualize dropout prevention programs as community based
- ✓ Create a community forum to inform the public about the dropout problem
- ✓ Use 21st century technology tools to interact with parents and the broader community about the dropout issues
- ✓ Encourage increased parent involvement in dropout prevention initiatives

Early Warning Indicators

While we know the reasons why individual students drop out of school are complex and varied, research by Dr. Robert Balfanz at Johns Hopkins University has indicated that these are the three most important factors for predicating who will drop out. We believe that messaging about the importance of these three areas, supplying data about the prevalence of these indicators at each school and providing resources that can engage community members will encourage schools and communities to collaborate on finding ways to address these problems.
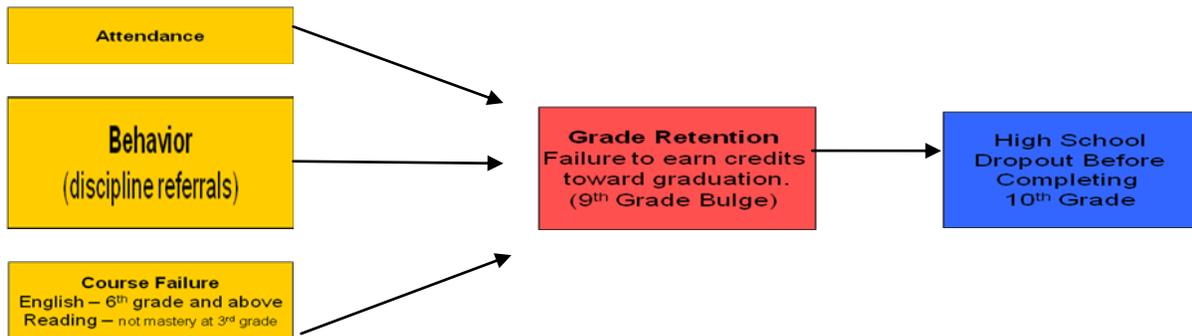
For most students, the decision to drop out of school is the final step in a process that began years earlier, so it is important to build a system that identifies these students as early as possible. The system would focus on key transition points in students' school careers, beginning with the transition into kindergarten.

The following chart is the result of an analysis of WV students most at risk of dropping out of school.

Indicator	6th Grade	9th Grade
Attendance	Below 90%	Below 85%
Behavior	1 or more suspensions	2 or more suspensions
Course Performance	1 or more semester failures Failing English Failing Math	2 or more semester failures Failing English Failing Math

Attendance

Frequent absenteeism is a significant predictor of dropping out. It also is the most common indicator of student engagement. Students, who are chronically absent due to poor attendance, frequent suspensions, or long expulsions, are disengaged from the academic and social life of school.

Strategies to consider when addressing attendance:

- ✓ Work with members and encourage district and school administrators to strive for 100% daily attendance at all schools.
- ✓ Create a culture that focuses on daily school attendance.
- ✓ Establish procedures that require phone calls the first day students are absent to parents or guardians.
- ✓ Encourage educators and community partners to communicate regularly with students' homes about the importance of daily school attendance.
- ✓ Districts and schools need to identify the reasons students are absent. Are they ill? Do they need to take care of siblings? Are they underperforming at school and, as a result, are reluctant to attend? Are they bored at school? Do they feel isolated? Are they being bullied or harassed? Is it certain groups of teachers whose students do not attend regularly?
- ✓ Advocate for more child care options in the community so middle and high schools students are not always caring for younger siblings while their parents are at work.
- ✓ Establish incentives for good attendance.

Behavior

Students who attend school regularly but are frequently removed from the classroom suffer the same disengagement consequences as do students who miss school often. There are many reasons why students misbehave in school/class. The reasons can be related to academic, social, emotional, developmental, or familial concerns

Repeat suspensions take students away from the classroom, resulting in lower grades and less enthusiasm for school. School leaders cannot keep tract of students who are suspended from school and this free time for students can lead into behavior problems in the community (i.e.: the community becomes a stakeholder in student's behavior in school and not being suspended from school).

Strategies to consider when addressing student behavior:

- ✓ Events in students' lives that may have negative effect on student engagement.

- ✓ Behavior problems may be exhibited years before they impact grades and lead to dropping out of school.

- ✓ Students who misbehave tend to get "pushed out" of the system. In these cases students are easily allowed or maybe even encouraged to drop out of school or transfer to another school.

- ✓ Teaching good behavior is as important as consequently bad behavior.

- ✓ Creating supports to help students improve their behavior.

Course Failure

Like grade retention and chronic absenteeism, failing in school is a major factor associated with dropping out. Many students fall behind academically in elementary and middle school, and by the time they reach high school, they are not able to catch up. Research shows that the most likely dropouts are sixth and ninth graders who fail math and/or English.

Failing a course is a better predictor of a student's probability of dropping out, than test scores. Even without failing, students who receive D's or have low GPA's can be at risk of dropping out.

Strategies to consider when addressing course performance:

- ✓ Increased instructional time in reading and mathematics in the daily school schedule.

- ✓ Reduced class sizes in all grades, including middle school and ninth grade in particular, so students will receive more intense and personalized instruction.

- ✓ Provide struggling students with one-on-one tutoring and supports before school, after school, in summer school and in the first quarter of each school year.

- ✓ Opportunities built into the school schedule to recovery credits previously failed, without failing "off track" to graduate.

Setting Up an Early Warning System

The need for data to be transparent with students, families, policy makers and the greater community is a critical component for developing trust and open dialogue on the topic of high school completion for all students and the implementation of successful dropout prevention plans

The National High School Center has an on line excel tool that can be downloaded for free, to assist schools in setting up their own tracking system of early indicators. They have created a template in MS Excel that is designed to make it easy for schools to enter the relevant information for their first-year students. The tool, available at: http://www.betterhighschools.org/pubs/ews_guide.asp from the National High School Center, automatically calculates the indicators for attendance, course failures, GPA, and on-track status and provides a report that lists each student and whether the student is below the defined benchmark on each of the indicators.

Setting up a data tracking system to determine which students are "on-track" and which students are "off-track" in reference to graduating on time, will inform educators who is most in need of interventions. When a student has one or more of the above identified indicators then they are at-risk of dropping out of school.

Best Practices Identified for Dropout Prevention

Fifteen Effective Strategies

The NDPC/N has identified Fifteen Effective Strategies that have the most positive impact on the high school graduation rate. These strategies appear to be independent, but actually work well together and frequently overlap. Although they can be implemented as stand-alone programs (i.e., mentoring or family engagement projects), positive outcomes will result when school districts develop a program improvement plan that encompasses most or all of these strategies. These strategies have been successful in all school levels from K-12 and in rural, suburban, or urban centers. Although the Fifteen Effective Strategies

were developed to be used to prevent students from dropping out, they are also pertinent to the issues of attendance improvement and truancy prevention. The strategies are grouped into four general categories: school and community perspective, early interventions, basic core strategies, and making the most of instruction.

Please visit the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network website to learn more about each of these strategies.

www.dropoutprevention.org

Comprehensive Arts

Research suggest that students who students who study the arts typically out perform their peers in most indicators of academic achievement. Arts classes provide excellent opportunities for students to learn the full spectrum of 21st century skills. Skills such as: creativity, problem-solving, self-direction, collaboration, critical thinking, communication, leadership and media literacy are routinely taught in arts classrooms. Many school administrators recognize that if students are to succeed in the 21st century, they need a comprehensive education that includes the arts, taught by exemplary arts educators.

The arts are also essential in personalizing learning for students, which is one of the fifteen effective dropout prevention strategies, according to the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. Many experience their first academic success in the arts, and those subjects may be the hook that keeps them in school. In other words, it may be what links students to their education, essentially creating relevancy for students. Some find their life's passion, or even their life's work, through arts classes. Students communicate through the arts and know that their voice is heard and valued.

What to consider in implementing a comprehensive arts program?

- ✓ *Standards-based instruction*. The arts should be taught to standards.

- ✓ *Equity of access.* Schools should make every necessary accommodation to provide equal access to every aspect of an arts program.

- ✓ *Teacher efficacy.* Extensive professional preparation is necessary to teach in an arts content area.

- ✓ *Extended learning opportunities.* Schools should help students make connections to their learning and "real world" experiences.

Wellness

Healthy behavior patterns established in early childhood often lead to lifelong benefits and decreased probability of serious health issues later in life. Early identification and treatment of health issues (whether physical, mental or socio-emotional in nature) can positively impact a child's life for years to come.

The health education curriculum includes the knowledge, understandings, attitudes, and skills that are important for balanced academic, social, emotional and physical growth and development. Health education can and should be integrated into all academic subjects. The goal is to develop confident, self-reliant, and self- directed individuals who are capable of reaching their full potential as productive members of society.

Physical

Physical Education is an integral aspect of an individual's total educational experience. It is the only subject area which primarily utilizes a medium of physical activity to obtain educational objectives. Although motor development is of primary importance, a great deal of emphasis is also placed on the individual's cognitive and affective development. The physical education program integrates current brain research that states: the more physically fit a student is, the higher the student achieves academically. The sequential and progressive design of a comprehensive curriculum, which is based on the individual's needs, abilities, and interests, produces students who understand the dynamics of exercise, enjoy life-long physical activity, and maintain desirable levels of fitness.

Social - Emotional

It is only a matter of weeks (sometimes days) after students enter a new school or begin a new year that it is clear to most teachers which students are experiencing difficulties adjusting (e.g., to new content and standards, new schools, new teachers, new classmates, etc.). It is particularly poignant to see a student who is trying hard, but is disorganized and can't keep up. If these difficulties are not addressed, student motivation for school dwindles, and behavior problems increase.

- ✓ Be *proactive* and to address any problems in the earliest stages.
- ✓ Provide *staff development* to focus on the type of strategies that will help teachers assess student's needs appropriately, provide effective intervention techniques, and create resources for referring students for additional supports when needed.
- ✓ Arrange for *student support staff to work with teachers in their classrooms* to intervene before problems become severe and pervasive and require referrals for out-of-class interventions.
- ✓ It is important to focus on and address transition problems enhancing engagement in learning working as a team to prevent problems from escalating.

Policies and Procedures

It is important to review current district and school policies and accurately assess if they promote or hinder student success. The applicant must clearly identify policies and/or laws that prevent student success. Many policies can affect student success. Below is a list of some of those policies:

- ✓ Attendance policy

- ✓ Discipline policy

- ✓ Grading policy

- ✓ Retention policy

- ✓ Credit recovery policy

- ✓ Flexible scheduling policy

Research to Support Best Practices

Institute of Educational Science, IES Practice Guide, "What Works Clearinghouse: Dropout Prevention", 2008
This guide is intended to be useful to educators in high schools and middle schools, to superintendents and school boards, and to state policymakers in planning and executing dropout prevention strategies. The target audience includes school administrators as well as district-level administrators. This guide seeks to help them develop practice and policy alternatives for implementation. The guide includes specific recommendations and indicates the quality of the evidence that supports these recommendations.

National Dropout Prevention Center, College of Health, Education, and Human Development, Clemson University, 209 Martin Street, Clemson, SC 29631-1555. Web site: www.dropoutprevention.org., "Fifteen Effective Strategies for Improving Student Attendance and Truancy Prevention", Jay Smink & Mary S. Reimer, 2005

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actually work well together and frequently overlap. Although they can be implemented as stand-alone programs (i.e., mentoring or family engagement projects), positive outcomes will result when school districts develop a program improvement plan that encompasses most or all of these strategies. These strategies have been successful in all school levels from K-12 and in rural, suburban, or urban centers. Although the Fifteen Effective Strategies were developed to be used to prevent students from dropping out, they are also pertinent to the issues of attendance improvement and truancy prevention. The strategies are grouped into four general categories: school and community perspective, early interventions, basic core strategies, and making the most of instruction.*

Kemple, J. J., & Snipes, J. C. (2000). *Career Academies: Impacts on students' engagement and performance in high school.* **New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corp.** (quantitative study)
This study uses a large-scale, multisite, experimental design to determine the effects of Career Academies on a range of student educational, developmental, and work-related outcomes, including student achievement and student engagement. This report provides information on the implementation of Career Academies. According to this study, Career Academies produce positive results, including improved high school outcomes for students at high risk of dropping out, increased likelihood of graduating on time for students at low risk of dropping out, and increased levels of interpersonal support and participation in career awareness and work-based learning activities. Career Academies did not improve student scores on standardized math and reading achievement tests.
Link: *http://www.mdrc.org/publications/41/full.pdf*

Gradual Disengagement: A Portrait of the 2008-09 Dropouts in the Baltimore City Schools
A Research Report by the Baltimore Education Research Consortium, Authored by: Martha Abele Mac Iver, August, 2010

Educational Leadership
October 2007 | Volume **65** | Number **2 Early Intervention at Every Age** Pages 28-33
An Early Warning System: **By promptly reacting to student distress signals, schools can redirect potential dropouts onto the path to graduation.**
Ruth Curran Neild, Robert Balfanz, and Liza Herzog

Carter, H. M. (2004). A case study of *Middle College High School***, 1972–2003: An effort to improve the persistence of at-risk students in high school and to facilitate their access to college.** (Doctoral dissertation, New York University, New York, NY). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 65*(03A), 188–846.

Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006. Every Child a Graduate: Is Your Local High School Making the Grade? 10 Elements of a Successful High School.
http://www.americaspromise.org/~/media/Files/Resources/10%20Elements%20of%20a%20Successful%20HS.ashx

Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. (2007). *Dropout Prevention.* Los Angeles, CA: Author Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA.

Resources to Assist in Development of Plan

West Virginia Center for Civic Life (resources for public/community engagement)

http://wvciviclife.org/

The Education Alliance of West Virginia
Community Action Guide (resource for creating community dialogues)

http://www.educationalliance.org/Downloads/Education_Alliance_-_Dropout_Prevention_WEB.pdf

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network
http://www.dropoutprevention.org/home

America's Promise – Grad Nation Tools
http://www.americaspromise.org/

IES Practice Guide – What Works Clearinghouse: Dropout Prevention
http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/dp_pg_090308.pdf

National High School Center
http://www.betterhighschools.org/default.asp

Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports
http://www.pbis.org/default.aspx

Communities in Schools
http://www.communitiesinschools.org/

Everyone Graduates Center/John Hopkins University
http://every1graduates.org/

Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/DropoutPrev/dropout.pdf