
WHAT WORKS

Evidence-based strategies for youth practitioners

Dropout Prevention

Edited by Sandra Kerka



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2006

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Introduction

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About What Works

What Works is intended to provide WIA youth-serving professionals with evidence-based information to support positive outcomes for youth. Each What Works contains a brief introduction that defines a topic of interest to WIA youth programs and a selection of reprinted resources that describe strategies known to increase the likelihood of youth success in the area.

The Dropout Picture

“Every nine seconds in America a student becomes a dropout” (Martin & Halperin, 2006). A recent report by American Youth Policy Forum opens with this startling statistic. The economic and social costs of dropping out of high school are severe. In the 21st century workplace, a high school diploma has become less than a minimum job requirement, and the income gap between dropouts and individuals who have completed high school or college is widening (Child Trends, 2005; Martin & Halperin, 2006; Shore, 2003). Higher rates of unemployment, receipt of public assistance, and incarceration are associated with fewer than 12 years of schooling (Child Trends, 2005). Some demographic groups are at much greater risk of dropping out. Black, Hispanic, and Native American students, foreign-born students, and students with disabilities complete high school at lower rates than other racial/ethnic groups, native-born students, and those without disabilities (Child Trends, 2005). Students who are disconnected or alienated from school, indicated by such signs as poor academic achievement, disruptive behavior, absenteeism, or negative attitudes toward schooling, are also more likely to drop out (Lehr et al., 2004). Elements of the school environment that also contribute to dropping out include large schools and class sizes, impersonal or negative school climate, and policies such as raising academic standards without providing supports, tracking, or retention in grade (Lehr et al., 2004).

Multiple Causes, Multiple Solutions

Sometimes dropping out is a sudden decision in response to personal crisis, but for many youth it is the result of a long process of disengagement and alienation. The factors that lead an individual youth to drop out or that make certain groups more likely to drop out are complex and multidimensional (Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2002). Therefore, prevention and intervention should take multiple approaches, tailored to individual needs and addressing local community and school conditions. Dynarski’s (2001) review of evaluations of dropout prevention programs concluded: “A high degree of personalization—a strategy of focusing intensively on why students are having difficulty and actively working to address the sources of the difficulties—is worth considering” (p. 14). Another review of effective interventions similarly found that 71% included a personal/affective focus, and 73% included more than one type of intervention to address a variety of individual needs (Lehr et al., 2004). The resources in this compilation offer strategies for identifying and implementing appropriate dropout prevention responses.

Lehr et al. (2004) summarize the key components of effective research-based interventions, including, on the individual front, helping youth envision and plan for an attainable future, enhancing student-teacher relationships, and addressing personal and family issues, and on the school front, creating smaller, more personal environments and coordinating academic and vocational components and personal and career counseling. Similar approaches are used in Reconnecting Youth (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.), a prevention program focused on substance abuse, aggression, depression, and suicide risk behaviors. Among the strategies Shore (2003) suggests for reducing the dropout rate are revising policies that tacitly encourage school leaving, addressing underlying causes (including attention to minor problems before they become major issues), and strengthening the capacity of teachers and other caring adults who influence youth.

Respecting Diversity

Polk and Evans (2000) explain why attention to culture matters in dropout prevention, and practitioners should keep in mind that youth may be members of more than one group at risk for dropping out, depending on their age, gender, ethnic background, primary language, and disability. Four other resources in this compilation provide an in-depth look at the needs of and specific strategies for different groups of students: Hispanic youth, immigrants, and youth with disabilities.

Lockwood (2000) reports on the conclusions of the federal Hispanic Dropout Project, which found that teacher perceptions and preparation can significantly affect the quality of their interactions with Hispanic students and thus influence dropping out. The key recommendations of the project include ways to strengthen the cultural competence of teachers in communicating with these students and their families. Lockwood provides a self-evaluation tool that teachers and other staff can use to benchmark their efforts to help Hispanic youth.

Walqui (2000) counters the belief that lack of English proficiency is the primary cause of dropout among immigrant students. In reality, these youth deal with complex economic, cultural, academic, and personal issues, including language. Her 10 principles of effective instruction for immigrant students pay attention to the culture of the classroom as well as the culture of the students; bilingualism is viewed as an asset and a scaffold on which students can develop their academic skills.

Students with disabilities are nearly twice as likely to drop out as the general population (Thurlow et al., 2002). Those at greatest risk are youth with learning, emotional, or behavioral disabilities. Thurlow et al. emphasize the importance of relationships, affiliation, persistence, and consistency in working with these youth, demonstrating belief in them and helping them get back on track when distracted. Both Thurlow et al. and Riccomini et al. (2005) recommend the Check and Connect intervention. In this strategy, a monitor “checks” on students’ level of engagement using indicators such as attendance, social/behavior performance, and academic performance, and “connects” the student with appropriate interventions when the indicators warrant them. Check and Connect is one of the Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions (CBIs) described by Riccomini et al. CBIs have been proven effective not just for students with disabilities but across a broad

spectrum of youth, because it is designed to teach them to develop healthier responses to difficult situations and can thus minimize the motivation to drop out.

Catch Them before They Fall

Shore (2003) and Thurlow et al. (2002) highlight the benefits of early intervention in dropout prevention. One type of early intervention is truancy prevention. Like dropout, truancy is caused by many factors. Walls (2003) explains that a key feature of truancy intervention is a multimodal approach that involves collaboration of many community stakeholders, including schools, parents, social service agencies, law enforcement, and juvenile courts.

Another early intervention involves paying attention to the transition from middle school into high school, a critical period for dropping out. Mizelle (1999) shows how a comprehensive transition program keeps students and parents informed, provides social support, and gets parents and teachers to work together to keep these younger students in school.

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What Are Key Components of Dropout Prevention Programs?

“What are key components of dropout prevention programs?” (2004). In Lehr, C.A., Johnson, D. R., Bremer, C. D., Cosio, A., & Thompson, M., *Essential tools: Increasing rates of school completion: Moving from policy and research to practice* (pp. 18-20). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration, National Center on Secondary Education and Transition.

Programs that have been designed to prevent dropout vary widely. Based on an integrative review of effective interventions designed to address dropout (and associated variables) described in the professional literature, Lehr et al. (2003) found that most of these interventions could be categorized according to the following types.

- Personal/affective (e.g., retreats designed to enhance self-esteem, regularly scheduled classroom-based discussion, individual counseling, participation in an interpersonal relations class);
- Academic (e.g., provision of special academic courses, individualized methods of instruction, tutoring);
- Family outreach (e.g., strategies that include increased feedback to parents or home visits);
- School structure (e.g., implementation of school within a school, re-definition of the role of the homeroom teacher, reducing class size, creation of an alternative school); and
- Work related (e.g., vocational training, participation in volunteer or service programs).

The majority of the interventions (71%) included a personal/affective focus. Nearly half (49%) included an academic focus. Most of the intervention programs (73%) included more than one type of intervention. These findings and other research suggest that preventing dropout can be achieved in a variety of ways. Given the vast array of program types, it becomes clear that there is not one right way to intervene. Rather than searching for the perfect program, identification of components that facilitate the effectiveness of interventions may prove to be a more valuable endeavor. Identification of these key components may help to guide the development of interventions, improve the likelihood of successful implementation, and serve as a useful framework for evaluating outcomes.

Researchers note that several components appear to be key to intervention success. Lists of critical components have been generated based on experience, literature syntheses, descriptive retrospective analyses of program implementation, and data-based approaches. However, these components require continued research and systematic implementation to determine the extent to which empirical data accumulates supporting them as essential intervention components (Dynarski, 2001; Lehr et al., 2003). The table below lists key components from several highly regarded sources and shows a significant amount of overlap. The extent to which interventions include these components in their design should be carefully considered.

Key Components of Interventions Designed to Decrease Dropout/Increase School Completion

The following are based on findings from an evaluation of 20 programs funded by the School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program (Dynarski, 2001).

- Creating small schools with smaller class sizes;
- Allowing teachers to know students better (building relationships, enhanced communication);
- Provision of individual assistance (academic and behavioral);
- Focus on helping students address personal and family issues through counseling and access to social services; and
- Oriented toward assisting students in efforts to obtain GED certificates.

Fashola & Slavin (1998). Based on a review of six dropout prevention and college attendance programs for students placed at risk.

- Incorporating personalization by creating meaningful personal bonds between students and teachers and among students;
- Connecting students to an attainable future;
- Providing some form of academic assistance to help students perform well in their coursework; and
- Recognizing the importance of families in the school success of their children's achievement and school completion.

Hayward & Tallmadge (1995). Based on evaluation of dropout prevention and reentry projects in vocational education funded under the Cooperative Demonstration Program (CDP) of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act.

- Smaller, more personal environment;
- Vocational education that has an occupational concentration;
- A formal counseling component that incorporates attention to personal issues along with career counseling and life-skills instruction;
- Formal, ongoing coordination of the academic and vocational components of participants' high school programs;
- A structured environment that includes clear and equitably enforced behavioral expectations; and
- Personal, supportive attention from adults, through mentoring or other strategies.

McPartland (1994). Based on review of dropout prevention programs and interview data from students who dropped out of school.

- Providing opportunities for success in schoolwork (e.g., intensive reading instruction in early grades, tutoring, curriculum modification to increase relevance);

- Creating a caring and supportive environment (e.g., use of adult mentors, expanding role of homeroom teachers, organizing extracurricular activities);
- Communicating the relevance of education to future endeavors (e.g., offering vocational and career counseling, flexible scheduling, and work-study programs); and
- Helping students with personal problems (e.g., on-site health care, availability of individual and group counseling).

Schargel & Smink (2001). Based on a body of work and program database generated by the National Dropout Prevention Center.

- Early intervention includes comprehensive family involvement, early childhood education, and strong reading and writing programs.
- Basic core strategies promote opportunities for the student to form bonding relationships and include mentoring/tutoring, service learning, alternative schooling, and out-of-school enhancement programs.
- Making the most of instruction includes providing opportunities for professional development, exploring diverse learning styles, using technology to deliver instruction, and providing individualized learning.
- Making the most of wider communities includes linking with the wider community through systemic renewal, community collaboration, career education and school-to-work programs, and conflict resolution and violence prevention programs to enhance effective interpersonal skills.

Thurlow, Christenson, Sinclair, Evelo, & Thornton (1995). Based on identification of key components across three interventions designed to increase engagement and school completion for middle school youth with learning and emotional/behavioral disabilities funded by the Office of Special Education Programs.

- Persistence plus (persistence in maintaining a focus on student educational progress and engagement with school; continuity in recognizing and attending to student needs across years via a person connected with the student; consistency in delivery of a message across adults—do the work, attend classes, be on time, express frustration in a constructive manner, stay in school);
- Monitoring (target the occurrence of risk behaviors, regularly collect data and measure effects of timely interventions);
- Relationships (building a variety of relationships to strengthen student success in school; adult-student, as well as home-school-community);
- Affiliation (fostering students' connections to school and sense of belonging to the community of students and staff); and
- Problem-solving skills (developing capacity of students to solve problems and enhancing skills to meet the demands of the school environment).

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Reducing the High School Dropout Rate

Shore, Rima. (2003). *Reducing the High School Dropout Rate KIDS COUNT Indicator Brief*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/indicator_briefs/dropout_rate.pdf. Reprinted with permission.

Education has always played a role in determining Americans' economic and occupational success, but its influence has never been greater than it is today. Over the past two decades, people without high school diplomas have suffered an absolute decline in real income and have dropped further behind individuals with more education. The result is a pattern of increased economic marginalization for those Americans with the least education. Dropouts who subsequently complete the requirements for a General Educational Diploma (GED) fare better than those who do not, but their earning capacity remains very limited (Murnane and Tyler, 2000). Reducing the dropout rate therefore requires urgent attention from policy makers and the public at large.

This indicator brief outlines five broad strategies for reducing the dropout rate:

- Make it harder for students to drop out of school
- Address the underlying causes of dropping out.
- Address the needs of the groups at highest risk of dropping out.
- Strengthen school readiness.
- Strengthen the skills and understanding of the adults who affect teens' motivation and ability to stay in school.

I. Make it harder for students to drop out of school.

Researchers who conducted a large-scale review of dropout prevention programs, collecting data for more than 10,000 students, began their report with this observation: "Dropping out of school is easy. Students who have done it say they simply stopped going to school one day. Some said they dropped out because they thought school principals or teachers wanted them to. Others said they dropout out because of circumstances beyond their control. Either way, they may have encountered little resistance from others around them" (Dynarski & Gleason 1999, p. 1).

- **Root out policies that tacitly permit dropping out or encourage students to leave school.** Many teens say that they were encouraged by administrators or teachers to stop coming to school. Some researchers see evidence of a "push-out" syndrome in many schools, where teachers and administrators make little effort to hold onto potential dropouts (Druian & Butler, 2001). Case in point: a report by the Hispanic Dropout Project concluded that schools often make active efforts to retain Hispanic students until they have been counted in that year's census. Once schools have received their state monies for the year, there are no sanctions for dropouts, and schools can experience relief from overcrowding as their enrollment decreases (Hispanic Dropout Project 1998). The report noted that district and state assessment policies can provide incentives for schools to drop low-performing students from their rosters including those with limited proficiency in English, need for special education services, or other academic needs.
- **Strengthen accountability for keeping young people on track.** One strategy for reducing the dropout rate is to make the issue part of administrators' performance evaluations (Clowes, 1999). However, so many factors affect the dropout rate that educators

should not be held solely responsible for keeping students in school. Nor should the dropout rate be the only method of gauging progress in serving youth. This was a key lesson of Casey's New Futures project. As a participant in the Dayton program noted, "We didn't look at child welfare, juvenile court problems, [or other issues]...Educators felt they were under fire and were the only system being measured." By only measuring educational outcomes, a report on New Futures concluded, the program sent the message that "the schools were accountable, and everyone else could stand outside the fray and snipe" (AECF, 2001).

- **Offer students the assistance and opportunities they need to stay in school.** When students are failing academically, alienated from school emotionally, or on the verge of dropping out, they need access to services that can help them and their families deal with personal and academic problems. Many approaches are possible, such as counseling, mentoring, and changes in curriculum. The key is for every school to ask what it would take to keep its students through graduation, and to follow through with the systemic changes needed to make that possible.
- **Stress the full participation of youth.** Over the last decade, the emphasis in the field of youth development has shifted from assuring that young people are problem-free to assuring that they are fully prepared. Now it is recognized that fully prepared is not enough. Young people need to be fully participating (Pittman, 2000). Some dropout prevention efforts are expanding opportunities for service learning. They are integrating an academic curriculum with structured time for organized service experiences that meet real needs in the community. Initiatives that involve teens, parents, and other adults in community projects can be especially effective (Simpson, 1997).
- **Gear dropout prevention efforts to the age and profile of the student.** Several models hold promise, including alternative middle schools; alternative high schools for students with motivation or academic potential; GED programs; or restructured schools and classrooms. However, none of these models will benefit every potential dropout. Middle school programs have found that an intensive approach—one that accelerates students' progress to allow them to catch up with their age peers—helps more students stay in school. For high school students, programs that aim to keep them on track and in school may work for those who are motivated to succeed; for others, a GED program may be a more realistic route (Dynarski & Gleason, 1999).
- **Base policy and program design on solid evidence about why young people drop out of school in a particular locality.** Many factors affect the likelihood that teens will drop out of school. Economic stress, grade retention, misbehavior, frequent moves, teen pregnancy, low self-esteem, and high absenteeism are all associated with higher dropout rates, but different factors are at work in different places. The same remedy will not work in every community. Researchers have found that the risk factors commonly used by dropout-prevention programs to identify likely dropouts often do not predict accurately which students will drop out (Dynarski & Gleason, 1999). To be effective, programs and policies need to identify and address local conditions or factors that raise the dropout rate. This requires adequate research and analytic tools as well as the capacity to tailor programs to local conditions.
- **Strengthen students' understanding of the connection between education and job opportunities.** Some dropout prevention programs combine intensive, individualized basic skills development with work-related projects. The goal is not only to enhance skills,

but also to make clear the relationship between education, on one hand, and economic and job prospects on the other (Druian & Butler 2001).

2. Address the underlying causes of dropping out.

- **Promote awareness of the links between staying in school and the resources available to families and communities.** Researchers have demonstrated that the odds of dropping out are influenced by many forces beyond the classroom or school. Access to economic opportunity also affects the dropout rate: Low-income students are three times more likely to drop out than middle-income students (NCES, 2002). Researchers have identified an income threshold below which total years of schooling decreases significantly: roughly three times the official poverty line (Axinn, Duncan, & Thornton, 1997). Children in families that experience persistent economic stress are more likely to drop out than those in families that experience intermittent stress.
- **Address the social and emotional conditions associated with poverty.** Families who live in poverty are less able to supply the nutrition and materials needed for children's healthy development. They have less access to safe neighborhoods, good schools, appropriate recreational facilities and adequate health services. Moreover, children growing up in poverty have less access to learning resources (such as tutoring or enrichment programs) than their better off schoolmates. But it is not a simple lack of buying power that makes children in low-income families more likely to drop out. Rather, the decision to leave school often stems from the social and psychological events surrounding poverty. In recent years, researchers have been examining the link between economic security and children's emotional status. They have shown that economic loss is associated with changes in parenting practices, with adverse consequences for children's emotional well-being. The family stress associated with poverty diminishes children's likelihood of finishing high school. (Teachman, Paasch, Day, & Carver, 1997. Conflicts about money appear to have a particularly negative influence on boys. (Conger, Conger, & Elder, 1997). More research is needed to shed light on the specific aspects of the home environment that reduce low-income children's chances of educational success. As they develop policies and programs, decision makers need to know whether children's chances of finishing school are predicted by particular patterns of parent-child interaction, the availability of educational materials, or some combination of these and other factors.
- **Focus resources on those young people who face multiple risk factors.** KIDS COUNT has established a Family Risk Index that identifies as a "high-risk child" one who lives in a family with four or more of these risk factors: (1) Child is not living with two parents; (2) Household head is high school dropout; (3) Family income is below the poverty line; (4) Child is living with parent(s) who is underemployed; (5) Family is receiving welfare benefits; (6) Child does not have health insurance. In March 2000, 27 percent of the 16-to-19-year-olds in the high-risk category were high school dropouts (not a high school graduate and not currently in school). For teens not in the high-risk category the dropout rate was 7 percent (AECF, 2001).
- **Address the linkage between residential mobility and dropping out.** Stable housing can matter as well: Children's likelihood of completing high school diminishes with each move they make (Weissbourd, 1996). Community development efforts that focus on housing can therefore help to reduce the dropout rate.

- Address minor problems before they snowball into the kinds of issues that keep students out of school. Problems that seem minor can become impediments to school attendance, leading young people to drop out. Lost eyeglasses that are not replaced, persistent teasing that is not addressed, or conflict with a single teacher can begin a chain of events that ends with a young person leaving school (Weissbourd, 1996).

3. Address the needs of those groups at highest risk of dropping out.

Each year, across the nation hundreds of thousands of students leave school without graduating. These are young people of every demographic description, but the problem is more common among some groups than others. Black students are more likely to drop out than white students: the difference between black and white dropout rates narrowed in the 1970s and 1980s, but has remained constant over the last decade. Hispanic youth continue to have a high dropout rate when compared to whites, blacks, or Asian/Pacific Islanders school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Students with disabilities are more likely than other students to drop out.

- **Focus intensively on strategies to help Hispanic youth stay in school.** Hispanic students are more than twice as likely as black students and more than three times as likely as white students to drop out of school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). In the midnineties, a task force appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Education spent two years studying issues surrounding the Hispanic dropout problem and provided a set of policy-relevant recommendations. In its final report, the Hispanic Dropout Project offered these key recommendations: (1) Depoliticize education for Hispanic youth, separating it from debates about language policy or immigration. Move forward at the local, state, and national levels with a coherent educational agenda. (2) Fund public schools appropriately to upgrade physical facilities, curriculum, instruction, and assessment. (3) Streamline and make intelligible those policies that parents and children must follow. (4) Change or discard those school policies that tacitly permit dropping out or actually encourage Hispanic students to drop out. (5) Just as standards for content and performance are critical in this age of education reform, districts and states should develop standards for school conditions, school and class size, and student opportunity-to-learn. (6) Districts and state education agencies should design comprehensive strategies for dropout prevention tied to the states' standards and that take account of students' different needs at different points in their lives (Hispanic Dropout Project, 1998).
- **Provide incentives and opportunities for students in high-poverty neighborhoods to succeed.** In these neighborhoods, education reform is not sufficient. They must be augmented with social-capital and economic-development initiatives that look at the whole community and the incentives, rewards, and opportunities it offers for academic and occupational success. These initiatives need to find ways to increase employment, enterprise and role opportunities for the families and youth who reside there (AECF, 1995).
- **Focus intensively on dropout prevention for high school students with disabilities and other special needs.** Given high dropout rates for students with disabilities and other special needs, special education programs and policies designed for high school students need to be re-examined. This is particularly true in light of standards-based education

reform. A key strategy of this movement is to increase graduation requirements. States have taken varied approaches to including students with disabilities in their efforts to raise standards. Some states have alternative exit documents such as “certificates of completion” for students with disabilities who do not meet standard graduation requirements. Many states offer only a standard diploma, with requirements varying across states. States that require students to pass graduation examinations also vary with respect to requirements for students with disabilities. The question remains: how will these reforms affect the ability of students with disabilities to graduate? As things stand, nearly one in three students with disabilities leaves school before graduation. Policy makers are grappling with difficult choices. Accommodating individual student’s diverse learning needs within a framework of state standards can be difficult and often requires modification of standards, instruction, and/or assessments. When ad hoc adjustments are made at the local level, such modifications can weaken accountability. States can respond by building into accountability systems flexible policies to define appropriate modifications for use at the local level (National Association of State Boards of Education, 2002). At the same time, research is needed to determine how the diverse approaches taken by different states affect long-term educational and employment outcomes for students with disabilities and other special needs.

4. Strengthen school readiness.

A growing body of evidence suggests that efforts to improve academic achievement and reduce the dropout rate need to begin long before children enter high school – or even middle school.

- **Address families’ access to economic resources and human services in children’s early years.** Families’ economic situations affect children’s educational attainment throughout childhood. But low income is more strongly associated with dropping out when it occurs early in a child’s life than when it occurs in later childhood or adolescence (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Maritato, 1997). Policies or programs that bolster family resources in the middle or high school years are not sufficient. Improving the effectiveness of the home as a learning environment is a key to promoting long-term school success (Druian & Butler, 2001).
- **In particular, improve access to health care, beginning with prenatal care.** Maternal health and the availability of prenatal care influence children’s birth weight, which in turn affect children’s likelihood of dropping out. Students who had low birth weights are significantly more likely than other students to drop out of school; this is true even when comparisons are made among siblings growing up in the same household (Conley & Bennett, 2000).
- **Expand access to high-quality early education programs.** There is new evidence that high-quality preschool experiences can improve graduation rates. In 2001, an article published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reported on a large study that followed nearly a thousand children from low-income families who took part in the Chicago Child-Parent Center study in the mid-1980s. Most of the children were African American. It showed that “public investments in early educational programs in the first decade of life can contribute positively to children’s later success” (Reynolds et al., 2001). The study found that, compared with similar children who were not in the program, participants had higher educational attainment up to age 20. They stayed in school slightly longer, and were more likely to graduate from high school.

5. Strengthen the skills and understanding of the adults who affect teens' motivation and ability to stay in school.

Some young people do well and stay in school despite tough circumstances. Researchers studying their resilience have found that children need personal anchors—stable, positive emotional relationships with at least one parent or key person. Parents are the key people in youngsters' lives, and they can benefit from family support efforts. Teachers and other adults can play an important role in fostering resilience. They may mentor students, either formally or informally. Or, they may play a role by offering something extra, perhaps by offering emotional support during hard times, acting as the student's advocate when conflict arises in school or at home, or providing an opportunity to pursue a special talent or interest (Garbarino, 1995).

- **Expand access to parent education and family support programs geared to the challenges of raising adolescents.** While peers, teachers, coaches, and friends' parents can take on added importance as children become teens, parents remain a powerful influence in promoting healthy development and keeping their children on track. But relatively little attention has been paid to supporting the parents of adolescents (Simpson, 1997). Providing increased access to parent education and family support programs can help parents negotiate conflicts or crises that can lead their children to leave school. These programs need effective outreach, curricula, staff development, evaluation, and linkages with other local services.
- **Use a variety of media and formats to offer more and better information to the parents of teens.** As researchers gather new findings and generate new knowledge about parenting adolescents, better ways of disseminating the information are needed. Stronger informational resources would benefit not only parents and teens, but also policy makers, health care providers, human services providers, religious leaders, advocates, and others.
- **Work with schools of education to recruit and prepare teachers who are motivated and able to teach students who have a history of failure.** A review of many federal dropout prevention initiatives showed that the effectiveness of programs for at-risk students depended more on the choice of teachers than the choice of curriculum (Dynarski & Gleason, 1999).
- **Provide ongoing staff development to teachers who work with at-risk youth.** Key characteristics of successful dropout prevention programs appear to be strong, sustained commitment on the part of teachers and strong leadership on the part of administrators (Druian & Butler, 1999). To maintain this level of commitment as well as expand knowledge and skills, school staff need ongoing support.
- **Involve teachers, parents, and teachers need to participate in the planning of dropout prevention programs.** Schools are often structured in ways that do not meet teens' learning needs, and restructuring efforts can increase their holding power. One obstacle to successful change initiatives is that grants are often written by one group and implemented by another. As a review of dropout prevention initiatives observed, "Enthusiasm for restructuring on the part of grant writers did not always translate into enthusiasm for restructuring on the part of teachers and principals, whose activities, roles, and relationships may be altered by restructuring" (Dynarski & Gleason, 1999).

Many dropout prevention initiatives are now underway. They employ diverse strategies to increase the holding power of high schools, including counseling and support services, attendance monitoring, challenging curricula, accelerated learning strategies, culturally sensitive parental outreach, stronger links between middle and high schools, community service, and school-to-work programs. Some states have expanded compulsory education to include sixteen- or seventeen-year-olds. These efforts are important, but more must be done. Decades of research and practice have shown that when it comes to reducing the dropout rate, focusing on what happens in high schools is crucial but insufficient.

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- For further information:*
- Academy for Educational Development, Inc., Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, (202) 884-8267, www.aed.org
- Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk, (410) 516-8800 (Johns Hopkins University), (202) 806-8484 (Howard University), www.csos.jhu.edu/crespar/CRESPaR.html.
- Dropout Prevention Demonstration Program, (202) 401-0113, www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/DropoutPrev/
- National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, (864) 656-2599, www.dropoutprevention.org

Respecting Cultural Diversity When Planning a Dropout Prevention Program

Polk, Roselyn, & Evans, Bill. (2000). *Respecting cultural diversity when planning a dropout prevention program*. Reno: University of Nevada-Reno; Tucson: University of Arizona Institute for Children, Youth, and Families. http://ag.arizona.edu/fcs/cyfernet/cyfar/nowg_bul_yth_4.pdf#search=%22%22dropout%20prevention%22%22

Applying CYFERNet Resources to Evaluate Youth Outcomes. CYFERNet (Children, Youth, and Families Education and Research Network) is supported by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture through the Children, Youth, and Families at Risk Initiative.

Citizens of the midwestern community of Blairsville were surprised to learn that the dropout rate for their high school youth was among the highest in the state. In addition, the dropout rate for Hispanic youth exceeded the dropout rates of non-Hispanic youth by a 3 to 1 ratio, with Hispanic males dropping out at a higher rate than Hispanic females. Concerned citizens formed a coalition to study the problem and determine how best to address the issue. The coalition consisted of community educators, Extension specialists, law enforcement officials, religious leaders, and leaders from the Hispanic community. Blairsville had, in recent years, undergone a significant change in demographics for both the overall population and leading industry. For decades, small, family-run farms had been the backbone of Blairsville's economy. Unfortunately, many of the family farms had gone bankrupt and been purchased by large corporations that make use of unskilled migrant labor. The city leaders had been fortunate to attract three mid-sized manufacturing firms and a major distribution center to the community. The resultant influx of the labor necessary to meet both the farming and manufacturing needs brought with it unanticipated demands and pressures on the local schools. Upon assessing the seriousness of the dropout problem, the coalition determined that a dropout prevention program was necessary.

Program Goals of the Coalition:

- Enhance school engagement
- Identify reasons for dropping out
- Reduce barriers for staying in school

Diversity

At an initial meeting of the coalition, several students reported that many of the Hispanic students felt isolated and not fully a part of the high school. Since addressing cultural issues was vital to a successful program, they decided to gather more information. The Extension agent volunteered for this job and consulted the CYFERNet website. At this site, an annotated bibliography on diversity provided important information to consider in tackling this issue: http://ag.arizona.edu/fcr/fs/nowg/sc_valdiv.html

Culture is used to describe the makeup of a group of people who value sameness—a shared religion, language, customs, traditions, and values that constitute the fabric of their belief system—while diversity describes visible differences. That is, diversity

Features that Constitute the Fabric of Various Cultures and Ethnic Groups

Religion
Language
Customs
Traditions
Values

describes how any given culture differs from other cultures. When diversity is valued, the differences that exist between people are acknowledged as a valuable asset (Barkman & Speaker, 1999).

Besides Hispanics, the community contained a substantial pocket of Armenian-American and African-American citizens whose perspectives would enhance the understanding of the needs to be addressed in a dropout prevention program. Many in the coalition believed that a community that is culturally diverse has many advantages over a community that is not. The inclusion of representatives from different cultures provided the coalition with a wide range of talents, communication skills, problem-solving skills, and cultural awareness. From this perspective, differences among the cultures were viewed by the coalition members as an asset or resource.

Academic Risk

Another resource at the CYFERNet site contained information on academic risk: <http://ag.arizona.edu/fcr/fs/nowg/ythrbacadrisk.html>. Here the coalition found that social factors such as cultural expectations, parental influences, employment, and intimate relationships can create a conflict between educational and social forces, increasing the risk of academic failure. Some students might be expected to contribute to the family income either by working or caring for siblings. Because many of the high school dropouts were finding employment with the farming corporations and manufacturing firms, the coalition realized that for any dropout program to be successful, they must first determine what specific components were leading the young people of their community to seek employment over education.

Some Components Likely to Contribute to Academic Failure among Adolescents:

- Boredom
- Differing cultural and gender expectations
- Lack of parental involvement
- Low self-concept and inadequate social skills
- Stress and pressures in family and peer relations
- A sense of alienation and isolation

Program Elements

It was decided that to really make a dropout prevention program work in their community, some important elements had to be in place. The coalition outlined five elements they wanted to consider in developing their dropout prevention program:

1. Build positive self-esteem;
2. Affirm identities with regard to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, handicap, and social status;
3. Teach youth how to learn to work and play together;
4. Find ways to help youth learn to communicate across their differences and to see the value of what each person contributes;
5. Provide fair and just treatment for all.

(Barkman & Speaker, 1999)

At subsequent meetings, guided by the goals the coalition had previously developed, several ways in which the local schools could promote the value of diversity; enhance inclusiveness; address

individual, family and group concerns about the value of education; and promote the school/ community connection were identified. These included:

1. Designate a multicultural awareness week;
2. Provide outreach activities that especially target minority families;
3. Promote a culturally sensitive curricula;
4. Use in-school volunteer and mentoring programs to promote parental involvement and reduce educational barriers;
5. Promote and monitor diverse youth involvement in extracurricular school activities.

Creating Inclusive Programs with Audiences Whose Primary Language Is Not English

Language differences, including differences in dialects among those residing within a given community, is often a difficulty faced by those wishing to develop a community, youth, and family program. Language and culture are intertwined in a number of ways. Comprehension and interpretation are set against a backdrop of knowledge shared by others within a given culture or ethnic group. Differences in that backdrop of shared knowledge, often referred to as common ground, can lead to problems when developing programs and evaluations within culturally diverse communities. One must take into account the multiple functions of cultural meaning, the differentiated and dynamic nature of culture, and the culture's relationship to ecological and sociopolitical factors (Miller, 1997). Language is not just about speaking a series of sequentially connected symbols. Language use includes being able to explain and comprehend within the context of the individual's cultural experience.

When developing a program to be used by those with differing languages:

- Enlist the aid of bilingual stakeholders to ensure that those less fluent in English are comfortable and can understand the issues being addressed.
- If using survey instruments, make sure the questions translate precisely from English to other language and back to English.
- Provide survey instruments in both English and other language.

Evaluation Plan

Subcommittees then were assigned to help design, develop, and evaluate each of these programmatic activities. It was decided that the entire coalition would reconvene every six months to report on their progress. Although each of the five program components had individual evaluation plans to help monitor success, the coalition also developed an overall evaluation plan to help monitor the coalition's activities. This included an agreement to closely track district attendance, truancy, and drop-out statistics for the next three years, and to conduct yearly focus groups at each school to help monitor the needs of students and faculty regarding school retention. The focus groups also were designed to help evaluate the success of the five program activities the coalition had developed. This evaluation plan was developed based on the State Strengthening Evaluation Guide and other resources of the CYFERNet website. These resource materials can be found at [http:// www.cyfernet.org/evaluation.html](http://www.cyfernet.org/evaluation.html)

Recommendations for Increasing Participation of Culturally Diverse Groups and 'Hard To Reach' Populations

Really get to know the community within which you plan to develop or evaluate a program. You should become knowledgeable about community agencies, the population demographics, and social and economic conditions.

Conduct focus groups prior to program development or evaluation to learn what is important to the community of interest.

Get the community involved in the program development, including the program curricula, structure, and evaluation.

Clarify the intended program from the perspectives of key stakeholders, policy makers, and staff.

Explore program reality, including the plausibility and measurability of program goals and objectives.

Recruit diverse personnel. The involvement of key stakeholders and individuals from populations of interest increases the program's legitimacy and facilitates program implementation and success.

When implementing the program, use same ethnicity interviewers or observers when possible.

About the NOWG website and other resources

The Youth National Outcome Work Group (NOWG) was formed to develop evaluation resources for youth programs. Group members recognized that the majority of Extension youth programs are focused on either enhancing social competency or reducing risk behavior. Thus, the Youth-NOWG developed web based resources, categorized according to competency and risk program outcome indicators. The NOWG web site provides selected information to community-based program developers, evaluators, and researchers relating to community, family, adolescent, and children community-based programs and evaluation. Among the information available are selected bibliographies, measurements and scales, evaluation guides, and links to related sites.

Other Sources of Interest

Anderson, P. P. (1989). "Issues in serving culturally diverse families of young children with disabilities." *Early Child Development and Care*, 50, 167-188.

Specifically addresses the broad cultural categories of Hispanic, Black, Asian, and Native American groups in discussing the cultural and situational approaches one may want to consider when planning, administering, providing, and evaluating early intervention programs that address the cultural diversity of children with disabilities.

Earthman, E., Richmond, L. S., Peterson, D. J., Marczak, M. S., & Betts, S. (1999). *Adapting evaluation measures for 'hard to reach' audiences*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.cyfernet.org/evaluation.html>

Outlines the problems of gaining information from hard to reach audiences such as those with limited English or low literacy skills. Makes recommendations for increasing participation of non-majority populations.

Esquivel, G. B. (1998). "Group interventions with culturally and linguistically diverse students." In K.C. Stoiber & T. R. Kratochwill, (Eds.), *Handbook of group intervention for children and families*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, Inc.

Especially for those developing group interventions for implementation with culturally and linguistically diverse students in school and community settings. Emphasis is on those students who have been born in the US but whose cultural background continue to exert an influence on their learning and social adjustment. While emphasizing cultural diversity, respect is shown for individual differences and commonalities in experiences.

Marin, G., & Marin, B.V. (1991). *Research with Hispanic populations*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Provides a history of why persons of minority status may be leery of researchers, as well as a test of acculturation in both English and Spanish. Recommendations are made for improving Hispanic participation in programs.

Stringer, E., Agnello, M. F., Baldwin, S. C., Christensen, L. M., Henry, D. L. P., Henry, K. I., Katt, T. P., Nason, P. G., Newman, V., Petty, R., & Tinsley-Batson, P. S. (1997). *Community-based ethnography: Breaking traditional boundaries of research, teaching, and learning*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

This book examines a community-based research project that engaged students in roles of ethnographers to study their own cultures and the cultures of others in their school in order to explore and understand cultural diversity.

Szapocznik, J., & Kurtines, W. M. (1995). "Family psychology and cultural diversity: Opportunities for theory, research, and application." In N. Rule-Goldberger & J. B. Veroff (Eds.), *The culture and psychology reader*. New York: New York University Press.

Based on the authors' work with Hispanic youths. Examines the notion of family, individual, and culture within a culturally diverse context; the idea of the embeddedness of contexts; and incorporates the notion of the individual within a family within a context in which the cultural milieu is defined by increasing diversity and complexity.

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Polk, R. K., & Evans, W. (1999). *Academic risk*. [Online]. Available: <http://ag.arizona.edu/fcr/fs/nowg/ythrbacadrisk.html>

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Transforming Education for Hispanic Youth: Recommendations for Teachers and Program Staff

Lockwood, Anne Turnbaugh. (2000). *Transforming education for Hispanic youth: Recommendations for teachers and program staff. Issue Brief no. 3.* Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, Center for the Study of Language & Education,. <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/pubs/issuebriefs/ib3.pdf>

In September 1995, United States Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley appointed a group of seven research scholars, policy analysts, and practitioners to study issues surrounding the Hispanic dropout problem and to provide a set of policy and practice-relevant recommendations. Through the next two years of its work, the Hispanic Dropout Project (HDP) held open hearings and took public testimony in locations around the nation whose schools enrolled large numbers of Hispanic students. Press conferences at those sites publicized the problem of Hispanic dropout. The HDP also reviewed the research on at-risk students and school dropout, and commissioned research syntheses and case studies illustrating (a) effective achievement programs for elementary and middle school, (b) effective dropout prevention programs for junior high and high school, (c) issues in the conceptualization of early school departure, and (d) teacher education for diversity and equity (Hispanic Dropout Project, 1998). This Issue Brief synthesizes and discusses the Project's recommendations for teachers and program staff.

An overarching conclusion of the Hispanic Dropout Project centered on the teachers who work with Hispanic students nationwide. These teachers, Project members agreed, can find themselves mired in a negative, self-fulfilling prophesy that has more to do with their preservice education or the structure of their school than with their student population. Project members discovered that a sizable number of teachers are simply not equipped to engage Hispanic students who are poor, who are recent arrivals in the U.S., or who are English language learners, in standard classroom practice. Moreover, instructional practices as they exist in many schools, particularly in urban schools of poverty, can alienate students from the life of the school and foster attitudes that lead to students dropping out entirely.

The Hispanic Dropout Project found that, with notable exceptions (Lockwood & Secada, 1999), many teachers believe that Hispanic students are difficult to educate and that the task eludes their capabilities. Project members concurred that these teachers' views may be reinforced by school structures that do not encourage classroom experimentation, project-based learning, or high-quality bilingual education. Teachers may also be influenced by other staff whose views related to immigration and English language learners have become politicized. Project members pointed out that when teachers are uncomfortable with Hispanic students or unschooled about linguistic and cultural issues, they may disengage—and draw consolation from similar behavior higher up in their districts. These teachers may expect special programs, such as bilingual education or Title I services, to carry the educational load for Hispanic youth who qualify for these services. In schools where interaction between mainstream teachers and bilingual education teachers is strained or difficult to achieve because of the school's structure, Hispanic youth can end up in an educational ghetto that consists solely of their peers. In such situations, the Hispanic Dropout Project concluded, Hispanic students may view dropping out as a sensible response (Hispanic Dropout Project, 1998).

The Project discovered that teachers may make one of two poor choices: They may decide to blame Hispanic students and their families for their difficulties in school—or choose an equally pernicious path in which they excuse Hispanic youth for poor academic performance because of out-of-school variables such as low socioeconomic status or lack of proficiency in English. The latter attitude is well-meaning but harmful, the Hispanic Dropout Project emphasized in its Final Report (Hispanic Dropout Project, 1998), because it truncates the possibility of higher-level instruction and the development of knowledge that is necessary to function in a technologically sophisticated society.

Teachers who feel sorry for Hispanic youth may decide that it is “kinder” to expect little from them. These teachers share benign intentions that are propelled by pity for their students. They may believe that they are “doing them a favor” by not providing challenging course content. Instead of holding Hispanic students to high expectations and standards—buttressed by a web of supports—they may think such behavior is unwarranted, even cruel.

These teacher-held attitudes, the Hispanic Dropout Project discovered, can extend to the ways in which teachers interact with and think about Hispanic parents and families. Identifying family members as the reason Hispanic students cannot succeed in school provides an easy rationale for school staff to disengage from them completely. If teachers and other school staff are disengaged or alienated from Hispanic families, they may abandon efforts to involve parents in the ongoing life of the school and their children’s academic performance. The Hispanic Dropout Project found that in schools serving high concentrations of Hispanic students, many staff assumed that parents and family members would not come to school, would not be interested in their children’s progress in school, and had little interest in formal education for their children (Hispanic Dropout Project, 1998).

The Hispanic Dropout Project’s key recommendations for teachers, including bilingual education teachers, emphasized a variety of interlocking factors. All of these highlight the quality of interactions between teachers, Hispanic students, and the families of Hispanic students. The Project underscored the importance of drawing upon the knowledge and skills that Hispanic students bring to school with them, rather than treating them as deficient or in need of remedial education because their cultural and/or linguistic experiences and backgrounds may be dissimilar to mainstream U.S. culture and society.

Key Recommendations for Transforming Teaching for Hispanic Students

Recommendation 1. Teachers should teach content so that it interests and challenges Hispanic students, helping students to learn that content. They should communicate high expectations, respect, and interest in each of their students. They should understand the roles of language, race, culture, and gender in schooling. They should engage parents and the community in the education of their children (Hispanic Dropout Project, 1998, p. 28).

One of the ways teachers interest and challenge Hispanic students is to use Hispanic students’ out-of-school experiences in a lively way to infuse and inform their classroom learning experiences. Rather than negating these experiences and the knowledge Hispanic students bring to school with them, teachers use these experiences as building blocks for academic mastery of sophisticated concepts and content. Instead of consigning Hispanic students to low-level

drill on boring content—and relying on outmoded instructional aids such as worksheets to keep students occupied—exemplary teachers seek out ways in which they can communicate interesting, challenging course content with real-world applications. Whether students work on computers, in cooperative groups, or develop exhibitions and portfolios of their work intended for real audiences, their schoolwork should be purposeful and meaningful. Exemplary teachers showcase the schoolwork of Hispanic youth, displaying it to students' parents and families. They engage students in oral and written explications of their work, communicating it to other students, staff, and family members. These teachers design class assignments that are an essential part of the curriculum, that are not fragmented and meaningless, but connected, cohesive, and focused.

Recommendation 2. Teachers should become knowledgeable about and develop strategies to educate Hispanic students and to communicate with their parents. Teachers should receive the professional development needed to develop those attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Hispanic Dropout Project, 1998, p. 28).

The Hispanic Dropout Project found that exemplary sites relied upon imaginative strategies to draw Hispanic parents and families into school life. For example, rather than expecting Hispanic families to conform to the conventional schedule of evening PTA meetings, these schools offered parent potlucks at the dinner hour or immediately after school to accommodate parents who worked two jobs or the night shift. Or, they maintained a parent room within the school where parents felt welcome to drop in during the day and visit their child's class. At such sites, staff succeeded in making school an extension of Hispanic families' daily lives and contributed to an overall positive relationship between home and school (Lockwood & Secada, 1999).

In addition, exemplary schools utilized their bilingual staff as team members to make home visits. These visits were planned carefully so that they were not seen as punitive but instead were affirmations of the student's value to the school. Staff at one school, for example, demonstrated the importance of having the child read aloud to the parent at home whether or not the parent was fluent in English (Lockwood & Secada, 1999). This emphasis on drawing the family member into the school's strategy to build literacy gave parents something concrete and manageable that they could do to help their children gain literacy, regardless of their English language skills.

While bilingual staff were an integral part of home visits, these visits were not consigned solely to them. Instead, exemplary schools asked all staff to share responsibility for building positive relationships with Hispanic families. At the school described above, staff who did not speak Spanish participated in home visits with bilingual staff to build their comfort level and expertise with families. And, while bilingual staff supported their non-bilingual colleagues, they did not control and supervise the emerging relationships between their colleagues and the family members of Hispanic students.

The Project added that it is unrealistic to expect teachers to be able to reinvent their practice alone—particularly if they teach in poorly financed urban schools beset with a multitude of daily crises. An ongoing, sustained, and in-depth program of professional development geared to teachers' classroom goals for Hispanic students must be a high-priority budget item that is protected and maintained by the district. Rather than consuming teacher time with disconnected workshops devoted to a long menu of topics, each year's program of professional development should be planned carefully with adequate teacher input so that it is valuable and current. At its best, strong professional development is planned over a period of years to maximize its

usefulness and impact, with teacher input to ensure that it is targeted to current instructional needs.

Recommendation 3. Teachers in high-poverty schools working with large populations of Hispanic students are often the last to receive high-quality professional development related to new instructional approaches, curricula, and unbiased ways to assess students. They should be the first to receive these opportunities (Hispanic Dropout Project, 1998).

The Hispanic Dropout Project strongly urged school districts to allocate sufficient funds for sustained, in-depth professional development related to instructional strategies that will further the academic achievement of Hispanic students. Districts with high, concentrated enrollments of Hispanic students are typically urban and suffer the constraints of severely inadequate funds. In such situations, professional development frequently is sacrificed as a cost-cutting measure or substantially reduced in scope and quality.

Teachers cannot be held accountable for student achievement, the Project agreed, when they are not provided opportunities to enhance their professional knowledge, skill, and craft. Putting a rigid new accountability plan in place without adequate supports so that teachers have the wherewithal to improve the quality of their instruction is the same as expecting Hispanic students to gain academic mastery without high-quality instruction.

Below is a self-evaluation tool intended to help teachers and other instructional staff develop more effective strategies by evaluating their own efforts to educate Hispanic youth, based on recommendations made by the Hispanic Dropout Project.

Self-Evaluation Tool for Teachers and Other Instructional Staff

Developing High-Quality Curriculum and Instruction for Hispanic Youth

1. In my school, teachers share a common understanding: All youth, regardless of race, ethnicity, linguistic, or socioeconomic status, should be held to high standards for academic performance, and supported in their efforts to gain mastery.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all
2. My school is structured in ways that permit teachers and other instructional staff to personalize instruction and build relationships with students.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all
3. In my school, mainstream teachers work with bilingual education and Title I teachers in partnership to further the achievement of limited English proficient (LEP) Hispanic students.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all
4. In my school, teachers use a variety of methods to engage Hispanic students in their schoolwork, using realworld applications of classroom content to make learning immediate, relevant, and connected to the daily experiences of Hispanic students.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all
5. In my school, students are expected to demonstrate their mastery of content both orally and in writing.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all

Professional Development that Supports High-Quality Instruction

1. In my district, substantive, in-depth professional development that has specific meaning to teachers as they work with high-quality content in the classroom is considered a high-priority budget item.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all
2. In my school, professional development is infused with strategies that meet the real-life instructional needs of teachers, including an emphasis on non-mainstream cultures, ethnicities, races, and languages.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all
3. In my school, professional development includes all instructional staff and emphasizes ways in which bilingual education teachers and mainstream classroom teachers can build effective partnerships to further the academic achievement of Hispanic youth.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all
4. In my school, professional development includes collaborative strategies to help instructional staff draw Hispanic parents and family members into the life of the school.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all
5. In my school, professional development is keenly attuned to teacher needs.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all

Building Partnerships With Hispanic Parents and Families

1. In my school, teachers who make home visits use a variety of strategies to involve Hispanic family members in the instructional life of their children.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all
2. In my school, bilingual education teachers are viewed as an important link to Hispanic parents and families, but all instructional staff share responsibility for developing effective family-school partnerships.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all
3. In my school, staff work hard to make the school a friendly place for the families of Hispanic youth.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all
4. Staff in my school provide families of Hispanic students a concrete set of strategies to help their children with their schoolwork, even if these family members are not proficient in English.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all

Accountability, High Expectations, and Hispanic Youth

1. In my school, teachers hold Hispanic students to high expectations for their academic achievement.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all
2. In my school, high expectations are fortified by school-provided supports, both social and academic.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all

3. My district's accountability plan is clear and disseminated through a variety of means to the parents and family members of Hispanic youth as well as other educational stakeholders.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all
4. My district's accountability plan is symmetric: teachers and students are held accountable for academic achievement.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all
5. Accountability in my district and school is not punitive.
Completely implemented To some extent In development Not at all

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Strategies for Success: Engaging Immigrant Students in Secondary Schools

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High dropout rates among language-minority secondary school students are one indication that many schools are failing to adequately support the needs of these students. The belief that student dropout is due to a lack of proficiency in English often leads educators to overlook the economic, cultural, academic, and personal issues that immigrant adolescents must confront on a daily basis. To be effective, programs must begin with a compassionate understanding of these students and recognize and build on the identity, language, and knowledge they already possess. Instruction developed for native-English-speaking students may not be appropriate for students who are still learning English. To engage immigrant adolescents in school, educators must provide them with avenues to explore and strengthen their ethnic identities and languages while developing their ability to study and work in this country.

This digest discusses 10 principles for developing effective teaching and learning contexts for immigrants adolescents and profiles one program that has been successful in promoting the academic success of its students by implementing these principles.

Ten Principles of Effective Instruction for Immigrant Students

1. The culture of the classroom fosters the development of a community of learners, and all students are part of that community.

Immigrant teenagers bring a variety of experiences to the classroom that, if tapped, can serve as a springboard for new explorations that enrich everyone's experience. In effective classrooms, teachers and students together construct a culture that values the strengths of all participants and respects their interests, abilities, languages, and dialects. Students and teachers shift among the roles of expert, researcher, learner, and teacher, supporting themselves and each other.

2. Good language teaching involves conceptual and academic development.

Effective English as a second language (ESL) classes focus on themes and develop skills that are relevant to teenagers and to their studies in mainstream academic classes. Immigrant students need to learn not only new content, but also the language and discourse associated with the discipline. Therefore, all subject matter classes must have a language focus as well.

Effective teaching prepares students for high-quality academic work by focusing their attention on key processes and ideas and engaging them in interactive tasks that allow them to practice using these processes and concepts. ESL teachers need to know the linguistic, cognitive, and academic demands that they are preparing their students for and help them develop the necessary proficiencies. Content-area teachers need to determine the core knowledge and skills that these students need to master.

3. Students' experiential backgrounds provide a point of departure and an anchor in the exploration of new ideas.

Immigrant adolescents know a great deal about the world, and this knowledge can provide the basis for understanding new concepts in a new language. Students will learn new concepts and language only when they build on previous knowledge and understanding. Some students have been socialized into lecture and recitation approaches to teaching, and they expect teachers to tell them what lessons are about. But by engaging in activities that involve predicting, inferring based on prior knowledge, and supporting conclusions with evidence, students will realize that they can learn actively and that working in this way is fun and stimulating.

4. Teaching and learning focus on substantive ideas that are organized cyclically.

To work effectively with English learners, teachers must select the themes and concepts that are central to their discipline and to the curriculum. The curriculum should be organized around the cyclical reintroduction of concepts at progressively higher levels of complexity and interrelatedness. Cyclical organization of subject matter leads to a natural growth in the understanding of ideas and to gradual correction of misunderstandings.

5. New ideas and tasks are contextualized.

English language learners often have problems trying to make sense of decontextualized language. This situation is especially acute in the reading of textbooks. Secondary school textbooks are usually linear, dry, and dense, with few illustrations. Embedding the language of textbooks in a meaningful context by using manipulatives, pictures, a few minutes of a film, and other types of realia can make language comprehensible to students. Teachers may also provide context by creating analogies based on students' experiences. However, this requires that the teacher learn about students' backgrounds, because metaphors or analogies that may work well with native English speakers may not clarify meanings for English language learners. In this sense, good teachers of immigrant students continually search for metaphors and analogies that bring complex ideas closer to the students' world experiences.

6. Academic strategies, sociocultural expectations, and academic norms are taught explicitly.

Effective teachers develop students' sense of autonomy through the explicit teaching of strategies that enable them to approach academic tasks successfully. The teaching of such metacognitive strategies is a way of scaffolding instruction; the goal is to gradually hand over responsibility to the learners as they acquire skills and knowledge.

Delpit (1995) argues that the discourse of power--the language used in this country to establish and maintain social control--should also be taught explicitly, because it is not automatically acquired. Guidance and modeling can go a long way toward promoting awareness of and facility with this discourse. For example, preferred and accepted ways of talking, writing, and presenting are culture specific. Developing student awareness of differences, modeling by teachers of preferred styles, and study by students themselves of differences and preferred styles are three steps in the development of proficiency and autonomy that need to be included in the education of language minority students.

7. Tasks are relevant, meaningful, engaging, and varied.

Some research indicates that most classes for immigrant students are monotonous, teacher-fronted, and directed to the whole class; teacher monologues are the rule (Ramírez & Merino, 1990). If students do not interact with each other, they do not have opportunities to construct their own understandings and often become disengaged. Because immigrant students are usually well behaved in class, teachers are not always aware that they are bored and are not learning.

Good classes for immigrant students not only provide them with access to important ideas and skills, but also engage them in their own constructive development of understandings.

8. Complex and flexible forms of collaboration maximize learners' opportunities to interact while making sense of language and content.

Collaboration is essential for second language learners, because to develop language proficiency they need opportunities to use the language in meaningful, purposeful, and enticing interactions (Kagan & McGroarty, 1993). Collaborative work needs to provide every student with substantial and equitable opportunities to participate in open exchange and elaborated discussions. It must move beyond simplistic conceptions that assign superficial roles, such as being the “go getter” or the “time keeper” for the group (Adger et al., 1995). In these collaborative groups, the teacher is no longer the authority figure. Students work autonomously, taking responsibility for their own learning. The teacher provides a task that invites and requires each student's participation and hands over to the students the responsibility for accomplishing the task or solving the problem.

9. Students are given multiple opportunities to extend their understandings and apply their knowledge.

One of the goals of learning is to be able to apply acquired knowledge to novel situations. For English learners, these applications reinforce the development of new language, concepts, and academic skills as students actively draw connections between pieces of knowledge and their contexts. Understanding a topic of study involves being able to carry out a variety of cognitively demanding tasks (Perkins, 1993).

10. Authentic assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning.

Assessment should be done not only by teachers, but also by learners, who assess themselves and each other. Considerable research supports the importance of self-monitoring of language learning (O'Malley & Chamot, 1989). Authentic assessment activities engage second language learners in self-directed learning, in the construction of knowledge through disciplined inquiry, and in the analysis of problems they encounter.

Calexico High School: Restructuring for Success

Calexico High School in Calexico, California, is attempting to put the principles described above into practice. Calexico is a bilingual/bicultural community on the southern border of the United States; 98% of the students are Latino, and 80% are English language learners.

Once an unsupportive environment for English language learners, Calexico High School now operates with a philosophy that is based on such principles as respect for students' culture, language, and background; a strong belief that all students can learn; and equal opportunities for all students to pursue further education. Calexico staff view bilingualism as an asset for the future and strive to develop academic proficiency, regardless of language. They have eliminated the tracking system and have high expectations for all students.

An efficient system of counseling is in place that provides support ranging from interventions to sustain or improve academic success to coordination with agencies outside the school that provide social services. Groups of students are organized into academies and supervised by teams of teachers to help all students feel connected academically. In addition, the school actively involves parents by holding all school meetings in Spanish and English and by having bilingual/bicultural staff that develop and maintain connections between home and school.

Learning English is given utmost importance. However, teachers realize that developing second language fluency is a long process, and that while it is essential to continue supporting and nurturing language development, cognitive growth also has an impact on long-range academic outcomes. Strong support is given to continuous development of students' academic skills.

Three language options are available for required courses: They may be taught through Spanish, English, or sheltered English. The same number of credits are granted for all options, and all options provide academically challenging study for students that will open doors to postsecondary education and other opportunities.

Through their commitment to providing all students with more opportunities to succeed, the staff at Calexico High School have created a highly effective secondary school program for immigrant students. (For a description of other successful secondary school programs for immigrant students, see Walqui, 2000).

Conclusion

The 10 principles of effective programs discussed in this digest can contribute to the success of immigrant secondary school students by creating positive and engaging learning contexts. A strong commitment to the educational success of immigrant students is ultimately the foundation for all successful programs. For society, this commitment involves supporting the development of effective programs through resources, funding, professional development, and research.

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Students with Disabilities Who Drop Out of School— Implications for Policy and Practice

Thurlow, Martha L.; Sinclair, Mary F.; & Johnson, David R. (2002). *Students with disabilities who drop out of school—Implications for policy and practice. Examining current challenges in secondary education and transition. Issue Brief, Vol. 1, Issue 2.* National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota. http://www.ncset.org/publications/issue/NCSETIssueBrief_1.2.pdf

Issue: Amid new school accountability policies and stiffer promotion and graduation requirements, what interventions work to lower an unacceptably high dropout rate for students with disabilities?

Defining the Issue

The dropout rate for students with disabilities is approximately twice that of general education students (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Increased concerns about the dropout problem are now emerging because of state and local education agency experiences with high-stakes accountability in the context of standards-based reform. States and school districts have identified what students should know and be able to do, and have implemented assessments to ensure that students have attained the identified knowledge and skills. Large numbers of students, however, are not faring well on these assessments. For youth with disabilities, several factors beyond academic achievement influence their ability to pass these assessments: accurate identification of the disability, provision of needed accommodations, and educational supports that make learning possible regardless of disability-related factors. In particular, the provision of accommodations assures that a student's true academic skills are measured in assessments, rather than elements of the disability.

Students with disabilities are included in the “all students” agenda of federal, state, and district standards-based reforms, and have been identified as being among the lowest performing students on current high-stakes tests. These scores have consequences for schools and often for students.

Under the Title I requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, schools will be identified as needing improvement if their overall performance does not increase on a yearly basis—or if any of a number of subgroups does not make “adequate yearly progress.” Students with disabilities comprise one of these subgroups to be included in accountability systems. If they do not perform well, what incentives do schools have to go the extra mile to retain these youth? Is it possible that schools and the educators within them may encourage special education students to seek alternative programs and leave their buildings—essentially pushing students with disabilities to drop out of school?

Increasingly, high-stakes tests have significant consequences for students—they determine whether they are promoted from one grade to the next, or graduate from high school with a standard diploma (Thurlow & Johnson, 2000). Students who experience failure or who see little chance of passing these tests may decide not to stay in school—because either they will not be promoted or they will not graduate with a standard diploma.

Accountability without the necessary opportunities and support for youth with disabilities to achieve high standards may increase the rate at which they drop out of school and fail to successfully complete school. It is important to determine the best way to keep track of the extent to which students with disabilities are dropping out of school, as well as to study ways to keep students in school. This Issue Brief explores the challenges of documenting dropout rates and ways to support students with disabilities so that they meet academic standards and graduate. It is expected that if students are engaged in school and are learning, they will successfully complete school with the academic and social skills they need to be successful adults.

Framing the Problem

The Context

Within the context of American schooling, there have been dramatic changes in who is expected to complete school. In the early 1900s, 96% of individuals 18 years and older had not completed high school. By the 1960s, the public school system had reduced noncompletion rates to 25% among the same age group. Today's rate of not completing high school is even lower, averaging about 14% of all youth 18 years and older (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). Of those who do not complete high school, about 36% are students with learning disabilities and 59% are students with emotional/behavioral disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Furthermore, today's world is different from that of the early 1900s. The United States is no longer an agrarian community in which most individuals tend farms or fill jobs not requiring a high school diploma. Today, the United States exists within a global community in which the needed skills are ever increasing, and most jobs require at least a high school diploma.

American society has decided that it can no longer afford to have students drop out of school because of the serious implications for social stability and economic development. Youth who drop out generally experience negative outcomes—unemployment, underemployment, and incarceration. School dropouts report unemployment rates as much as 40% higher than youth who have completed school. Arrest rates are alarming for youth with disabilities who drop out of school—73% for students with emotional/behavioral disabilities and 62% for students with learning disabilities. More than 80% of individuals incarcerated are high school dropouts (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1995). When taxpayers spend approximately \$51,000 per year to incarcerate one person, compared to approximately \$11,500 to educate one child with a disability, the cost effectiveness of high school graduation is obvious.

While the dropout problem exists throughout the United States, it is worse in some areas of the U.S. and among some specific populations of students. High-risk areas include the southern and western regions of the country, and large urban centers. Populations placed at high risk include youth with disabilities, students from low-income families and communities, and students with non-European American or non-Asian, single parent backgrounds. When differences in the “high risk” indicators of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status are controlled, youth with disabilities are among those at greatest risk for dropping out of school.

Conceptual Orientation

Dropping out is the outcome of a long process of disengagement and alienation, preceded by less severe types of withdrawal such as truancy and course failures (Finn, 1989, 1993).

Appreciation has grown for viewing the path to dropping out as complex and multidimensional, and for focusing on family and school variables in efforts to reduce dropout rates (Egyed, McIntosh, & Bull, 1998; Finn, 1993). Four broad intervention components are important in enhancing student motivation to stay in school and work hard: opportunities for success in schoolwork, a caring and supportive environment, clear communication of the relevance of education to future endeavors, and addressing students' personal problems (McPartland, 1994).

Measurement and Definitional Considerations

Although it is easy to talk about dropout rates, it is not as easy to keep track of them. Tracking special education dropout rates is especially challenging. Yet such information is critical in communicating the significant dropout problems of youth with disabilities to Congressional and state legislative bodies, state and local administrators, and the general public.

There have been numerous attempts to identify the best definition of the dropout rate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000), but these definitions have varied according to the purpose of calculating dropout rates as well as according to the ways in which data can be collected.

Three kinds of dropout rate statistics are used—event rates, status rates, and cohort rates. Each of these has a different definition, and produces a different dropout rate (see Table 1). Generally, event rate formulas yield dropout rates that are smaller than those from status rates and cohort formulas.

Table 1: Dropout Rate Statistics

Type of Dropout Statistic	Definition	Relative Value
Event Rate (Annual rate; Incidence rate)	Measures the proportion of students who drop out in a single year without completing high school	Smallest number
Status Rate (Prevalence rate)	Measures the proportion of students who have not completed high school and are not enrolled at one point in time, regardless of when they dropped out	Between event and cohort rates
Cohort Rate (Longitudinal rate)	Measures what happens to a single group (or cohort) of students over a period of time	Largest rate

Source: National Center for Education Studies (1993-2001)

The most common sources of variation in reported dropout rates are: (a) the accounting period for calculating the dropout rate; (b) how long it takes for an unexplained absence to be counted as dropping out; (c) inaccurate data reporting, resulting in duplicate counts of students; (d) the grade levels included in calculating dropout rates; (e) the ages of students who can be classified as dropouts; and (f) whether students who attend alternative educational settings are considered as enrolled in school. Some of these sources of variation are due to difficulty in keeping track of students, technical incompatibility of different data management systems, and financial constraints (Williams, 1987). These types of variation in calculations result in some students being excluded

from dropout counts. In addition, who is excluded varies from one state or school district to the next.

The definition of “dropout” and the data sources currently used by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) differs from the definition used by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD), significantly compromising the capacity to make accurate comparisons of special education and general education dropout numbers. This exacerbates efforts to chart the necessary and highly important progress of students with disabilities in relation to their peers without disabilities.

What We Know

Regardless of how the dropout rate is calculated, whether following a class of students over a few years or examining a particular age group, students with disabilities drop out at much higher rates than other students. This may be understandable, but not acceptable, given what is known about variables that are related to dropping out of school.

Research has identified a consistent set of variables related to the tendency for a student to drop out of school. Some of these variables can be altered, and others, called status variables, are unlikely to change (see Table 2).

Table 2: Examples of Status and Alterable Variables

Class of Variables	Status Variables	Alterable Variables
Student	Disability (e.g., LD, EBD)	Attendance (e.g., sporadic)
Family	Structure (e.g., single parent family)	Supervision of free time (e.g., rarely occurs)
Peers	Intelligence (e.g., low IQ)	Identification with school (e.g., alienated)
School	Socioeconomic status (e.g., living in poverty)	Monitoring of student progress (e.g., consistently occurs)
Community	Geographic features (e.g., urban)	Support services (e.g., available)

Source: Christenson, Sinclair, & Hurley (2000)

The variables shown in Table 2 are examples and by no means exhaustive. In fact, for each of the variables, it is possible to identify both a risk factor (e.g., a single parent family) and a protective factor (e.g., a two-parent family). These factors are, of course, generalizations because variables interact with each other to create greater or lesser risk or greater or lesser protection. Still, recognizing the difference between those variables that educators and others can influence and those that are static is important when thinking about interventions for curtailing dropout rates of students with disabilities.

In the early 1990s, three projects funded by OSEP successfully implemented interventions to prevent student dropouts among those students with disabilities who were at greatest risk—those with learning disabilities and those with emotional or behavioral disabilities. These projects carefully tracked students so that they knew who continued in school and who dropped out. Five intervention strategies used by the projects helped to prevent school dropouts among a high risk population (Thurlow, Christenson, Sinclair, Evelo, & Thornton, 1995):

- **Persistence, Continuity, and Consistency**—these were always provided in concurrently, to show students that there was someone who was not going to give up on them or allow them to be distracted from school, that there was someone who knew the student and was available to them throughout the school year, the summer, and into the next school year, and that there was a common message about the need to stay in school.
- **Monitoring**—the occurrence of risk behaviors (e.g., skipped classes, tardiness, absenteeism, behavioral referrals, suspensions, poor academic performance) was consistently tracked, as were the effects of interventions in response to risk behaviors.
- **Relationships**—a caring relationship between an adult connected to the school and the student was established.
- **Affiliation**—a sense of belonging to school was encouraged through participation in school-related activities.
- **Problem-Solving Skills**—skills students need for solving a variety of problems were taught and supported so students were able to survive in challenging school, home, and community environments.

Check and Connect, one of the three projects, was located in Minneapolis, where the dropout rate among students with learning and emotional/behavioral disabilities was well over 50%. Focusing first on middle school students, the project used systematic procedures for checking (continuous monitoring of tardiness, skipped classes, absenteeism, behavior referrals, detention, suspensions, course failures, accrual of credits) to identify students with high risk levels, and connecting (through two levels of intervention—basic, consisting of regular core connect strategies, and intensive, consisting of in-depth problem-solving, academic support, and exploration of recreation and community services). For students who continued in the Check and Connect intervention through ninth grade, the project found significant evidence of treatment effects—9% had dropped out of school, compared to 30% of students who received interventions only in seventh and eighth grades; 46% of these students were on track to graduate in four years (68% in five years), compared to 20% of control group students in four years and (29% in five years) (Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley, 1998).

After the completion of the initial project, which focused on middle school students through ninth grade, project researchers expanded their efforts to the high school level, and then down to elementary schools. This expansion highlighted the benefits of targeting dropout prevention efforts toward youth with disabilities, indicating that elementary school is where dropout prevention strategies need to start, and also that high school students involved in systematic dropout prevention efforts are more likely to stay in school and to influence their own transition plans for later success. Still, the projects identified numerous barriers (e.g., lack of communication, punitive discipline) that can tip the balance away from existing supports (e.g., true teaming, afterschool activities) (Christenson, Sinclair, Thurlow, & Evelo, 1995). The Check and Connect project produced a manual so that other districts and schools could adapt and implement the check and connect procedure (Evelo, Sinclair, Hurley, Christenson, & Thurlow, 1996). It identified numerous strategies for moving beyond the procedures of Check and Connect—strategies that view parents and the community as partners in the effort to keep kids in school.

A number of other successful models exist to prevent dropouts and to encourage dropout reentry. Among these are programs funded by the Office of Educational Research and

Improvement (OERI) in the U.S. Department of Education, and the Employment and Training Administration (ETA), U.S. Department of Labor. In a recent nationwide analysis of dropout programs (U.S. General Accounting Office, 2002), three distinct approaches and models were identified. These include (1) supplemental services for at-risk students (e.g., mentoring, tutoring, counseling, and social support services); (2) different forms of alternative education programs for students who do not do well in regular classrooms (e.g., career academies, some charter school options, other alternative education schools); and (3) schoolwide restructuring efforts for all students (e.g., school within a school, adaptations to school schedules, freshman academy). While providing promise for what can be done and what can be learned, these models also identify continuing challenges to preventing dropouts and maintaining engagement of youth in schools. Questions must also be raised as to the direct and meaningful application of these approaches and models in addressing the needs of special education students.

What We Need to Know

Despite the progress made in decreasing dropout rates, the new context of standards-based reforms and associated high-stakes testing raises new questions and new issues. Among several critical next steps are the following:

- Explore and examine possible common definitions of dropping out of school and completing school for general education and special education students.
- Identify, document, and widely disseminate research-based information on best practices in dropout prevention and intervention, including models developed by OERI, OSEP, ETA, and other organizations.
- Continue to demonstrate and validate new dropout prevention and intervention strategies that work with particularly high risk groups of students (e.g., students with emotional disabilities, minority students, students living in poverty, etc.).
- Explicitly investigate the impact of new accountability forces (e.g., high stakes testing, stiffer graduation requirements, varied diploma options) on the exit status and school completion of youth with disabilities.
- Maximize the use of newly funded longitudinal studies (e.g., National Transition Longitudinal Study-2 and Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study) to examine the relationships among students' engagement with school and critical contextual variables of home, school, community, and peers in association with students' status of exit from school.

As noted recently by the U.S. General Accounting Office (2002), the multiple adverse consequences of dropping out of school are too significant to ignore. Continued efforts in this area, particularly in relation to students with disabilities, are imperative.

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Cognitive Behavioral Interventions: An Effective Approach to Help Students with Disabilities Stay in School

Riccomini, Paul J.; Bost, Loujeania Williams; Katsiyannis, Antonis; & Zhang, Dalun. (2005). *Cognitive behavioral interventions: An effective approach to help students with disabilities stay in school. Effective interventions in dropout prevention: A practice brief for educators, Vol. 1, Number 1*. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities, Clemson University. <http://www.dropoutprevention.org/NDPC-SD/resources/docs/PrctBrief.pdf>

Introduction

Preventing youth from dropping out of school is an enormous challenge for school systems, especially students who display aggressive behaviors at school. While many aspects of managing student behavior in the classroom are challenging, chronic and severe aggressive behaviors are most difficult to manage. The aggressive student is often characterized as verbally (i.e., defiant, use of profane and negative language) and physically (e.g., fighting, spitting, biting, hitting) abusive towards teachers and students. Generally, these students exhibit aggressive behaviors in all school situations, particularly in less structured situations (e.g., lunch, hallways, recess, and inactive classrooms). These behaviors act as impediments to academic success and are threats to school completion. Given that, students with disabilities dropout at over twice the rate of their same age peers, states and local education agencies are in need of dropout prevention interventions that work. When schools implement effective strategies there are extraordinary benefits for youth, communities, and society. One validated approach that works well to reduce physical and aggressive behaviors in youth with disabilities is cognitive-behavioral interventions.

This Practice Brief based on the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) supported work by the What Works In Transition Synthesis Center, *The Effects of Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions on Dropout for Youth with Disabilities* (Cobb, Sample, Alwell, & Johns, 2005), provides educators with a conceptual understanding and technical information to assist in implementing cognitive-behavioral interventions that reduce aggressive behaviors in students.

Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions

Cognitive-behavioral interventions (CBIs) refer to a number of different but related interventions used to change behavior by teaching individuals to understand and modify thoughts and behaviors. Problem solving, anger control, self-instruction, and self-control are examples of interventions under the umbrella of CBI. Typically, students learn to recognize difficult situations that have produced inappropriate/violent responses, then identify and implement an acceptable response. Students also learn to restrain aggressive behavior using covert speech. Through various teaching and role-playing activities, students will more consistently engage in appropriate behavior when faced with the various situations that have caused problems in the past.

Cognitive-behavioral interventions have shown effectiveness across educational environments, disability types, ethnicity, and gender. For example, positive effects were demonstrated in large urban high schools, private schools with enrollments of over 200 children, and residential

facilities. They have also demonstrated positive effects on adolescents who have emotional and/or behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, mental retardation, depression, and other problems associated with dropping out. They have been shown effective in studies that involved male and female African-American and Caucasian students.

Common Components of CBI

CBI incorporates a combination of behavioral and cognitive approaches to teach students to identify difficult situations, think the situation through, and exhibit appropriate responses. CBI provides a series of steps for students to analyze their performance, develop various behavioral options, and then select the most appropriate behavior or response for the situation. The common cognitive and behavioral components used in CBIs are described next.

Cognitive components. The cognitive component of CBI incorporates an internal “road map” for students to use when trying to regulate their behavior. Teachers teach students strategies that promote self-regulation, increase positive behavior, and reduce inappropriate behavior. These various strategies help students to carefully and systematically think through situations and decide how to respond appropriately (e.g., walk away instead of hitting). By teaching students how to think through a situation and apply strategies that generalize, students are more likely to improve their overall behavior across settings. The cognitive components of CBI training usually include the direct teaching of a specific problem-solving strategy, self-instruction, communication skills, relaxation, and situational self-awareness. Problem solving is the most frequently used cognitive component in CBIs. Successful problem-solving instruction consists of several components, and each is taught directly to students with patterns of aggressive behaviors. The generic components of problem solving include:

1. **Recognition of the problem.** Students are instructed and given the opportunity to practice recognizing problem situations. Role playing, case studies, and both real and hypothetical problems are used to help students recognize the existence of problems.
2. **Define and articulate specifics of the problem.** Students are allowed to practice describing the problem including who is involved, where the problem occurred, and what happened. Students are encouraged to view the problem from their own perspective. Question generation and task analysis of situational problems assist students to learn how to articulate problems.
3. **Develop a procedural process for solving the problem.** Students are explicitly taught all steps in the problem-solving process through teacher modeling. Students are then provided ample guided practice with corrective feedback and positive reinforcement, and independent practice. Students learn to order the steps in a sequential process that helps lead to an appropriate solution to the problem. Role playing, group discussions activities, and self-monitoring are effective approaches to teach the systematic process.
4. **Generate alternative strategies to approach the problem.** Using a systematic procedure, students learn to generate alternative solutions through brainstorming multiple strategies for solving the problem. Students are taught to respond to the probe “What are your possible solutions?” Because learning to generate alternatives is positively related to increased problem-solving skills and social adjustments throughout life, generating alternatives is a crucial component of problem solving.

5. **Evaluate the consequences of each generated alternative.** The goal of this component is to teach students to identify the most effective solutions. Students are encouraged to identify the most feasible alternatives and generate possible consequences for each alternative in terms of benefits and risks. Students are encouraged to select alternatives that are safe and fair. This component provides essential practice in evaluating consequences and making appropriate future choices.
6. **Decide on a course of action and try it.** Students are directed to decide upon the best alternative to resolve the problem and to try the selected alternative. Students are allowed to rehearse and implement the solution, and then discuss consequences.
7. **Evaluate the effectiveness of the selected alternative.** Students are assisted to determine if the solution worked. Students are made aware that the initial choice may not always resolve the problem and other alternatives may need to be considered.

The following procedural process is an example used in the research (Etscheidt, 1991):

- a. Stop and think before acting. Students learn to use self-talk and relaxation techniques to restrain aggressive responses and impulsive actions.
- b. Identify the problem. The students are required to distinguish the specific aspects of a problematic situation that may elicit an aggressive response.
- c. Develop alternative solutions. Students generate at least two alternative solutions to a problematic situation.
- d. Evaluate the consequences of possible solutions. Students assess the benefits of each possible solution.
- e. Select and implement a solution. The students perform the selected alternative.
- f. Evaluate the outcome.

Behavioral components. The behavioral components of CBI incorporate systematic procedures for rewarding students for the reduction of aggressive behavior and the use of the problem-solving strategies. The behavioral components generally include the use of social reinforcers of praise and recognition, listening to CDs, playing computer games, token economy point systems, and behavioral contracting. Behavioral contingency contracts are most frequently used to motivate students towards desirable behavioral change. In addition to the contingency management contract, modeling, corrective feedback, and multiple practice opportunities are essential for the consistent and overall reduction of aggressive behavior. The following steps are involved in writing a contingency contract:

1. Teacher determines and outlines the specific behaviors required of the student.
2. The teacher and student identify the reinforcement for which the student will work. The designated reinforcement should only be available to the student for performing the specified behavior.
3. The teacher writes up the behavior contract, specifying the exact terms of the contract, including the amount and type of behavior required and the amount and frequency of the contingent reward. The contract should be fair to both the teacher and student and stated in positive terms. The contract should also state the method and frequency for data collection.

4. The teacher meets with the student to explain the contract and ensure agreement. Both parties sign the contract.
5. The teacher monitors for the specific behavior and rewards the student according to the terms of the contract.

Teaching CBI

CBI is generally taught in a series of 10 or more class sessions. CBI can be taught to students by general and special education teachers, school psychologists, or behavior specialists in one-to-one, small group, or large-group instructional formats. The structure of the sessions depends upon the severity of the targeted behavior. Although the specific cognitive and behavioral components may vary (i.e., problem-solving strategy, reinforcers), a variety of instructional techniques can be used including mentoring, teacher and peer modeling, role playing, and behavioral rehearsal.

A common instructional theme in using CBI to reduce aggression that contributes to dropout was that students were explicitly taught a strategy and the appropriate behavioral response by the teacher. The instructional design features included multiple models, frequent opportunities for guided practice with plenty of corrective feedback, positive reinforcement, independent practice, and specific generalization strategies. Students are provided many opportunities to respond and actively engage in role playing and other situational instructional activities. Additionally, teachers monitor student progress by observing and recording student behavior across various settings. When students do not make progress, teachers provide additional models, feedback, and opportunities to practice (i.e., practice behaving appropriately to various problematic situations). The monitoring of student performance (e.g., appropriate behavior) is essential to the effectiveness of the CBIs. Monitoring student progress allows re-teaching of specific steps in the problem-solving strategy and appropriate behavior when necessary.

Implementation Considerations

Three major considerations regarding the implementation of CBIs are the (a) availability of resources, (b) expertise of teachers and staff, and (c) specialized curricula modifications. The majority of CBI-based programs involve the use of a commercially available curriculum such as the Walker Social Skills Curriculum (Walker, Todis, Holmes, & Horton, 1998); however, the teacher or Individualized Education Planning (IEP) team using the steps and examples provided in this practice brief can design their own CBI.

Additionally, the behavioral components of the CBI programs include some type of reinforcement. Verbal praise and token economy systems are frequently used. Token economies generally include rewarding students with an item that is positively reinforcing when the student earns a certain number of points. The items may include homework passes, extra computer time, or some edible reinforcer. Some are free; however, some require purchase.

Because most of the CBI programs require some technical expertise in the area of behavior, specific professional development activities and specialized training may be necessary depending on the experience of the teachers and staff. Additionally, some of the CBI-based programs require additional support for the student and teacher by a school psychologist, behavioral

specialist, and/or counselor. Careful review of selected CBI curricula is recommended to identify any specialized professional development that may be necessary.

Most CBI curricula include 10-20 traditional sessions; however, some students may require additional instructional lessons containing more models and opportunities for practice. Teachers may need to modify the CBI materials and procedures to include more models, opportunities for guided and independent practice, and specific and systematic generalization strategies. The system used to monitor student performance is very helpful in determining what students need additional instructional time.

Conclusion

Using cognitive-behavioral interventions can substantively lessen the kinds of problem behaviors that frequently result in school suspensions and/or expulsions that subsequently lead to school dropout. For students with emotional disorders or other types of disabilities, cognitive-behavioral interventions that teach students to discuss appropriate behaviors, role-play, and sequences of self-talk to problem solve are effective in helping to decrease aggressive behaviors that act as impediments to school completion. Moreover, token economies, behavioral contracts, and/or the use of reinforcers for appropriate behaviors can be successful in motivating students to use CBI to decreasing angry or aggressive outbursts in a variety of settings and situations.

An Example from the Research

Check and Connect is one model that already has evidence of effectiveness and shows great promise in many settings and contexts. Originally funded in the early 1990s by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), Check and Connect is a dropout prevention and intervention procedure developed to encourage middle school youth at high risk for dropping out to remain engaged in school and on track to graduate (Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley, 1998). Students may be referred to Check and Connect for a variety of reasons including chronic attendance problems, poor grades and assignment completion, behavioral challenges, and truancy petitions. There are two major components of Check and Connect.

Check. In the “Check” component, an assigned individual monitors student levels of school engagement on a daily basis using the following risk factor measures: (a) tardiness, (b) skipping classes, (c) absenteeism, (d) behavior referrals, (e) detention, (f) suspensions, (g) course failures, and (h) accrual of credits. Key to this component is the role of the monitor—one individual who is responsible for ensuring that a student connects with school and is learning. The Check and Connect monitor must be persistent, believe that all children have abilities, be willing to work closely with families using a “nonblaming approach,” advocate for the student, be committed to documenting interventions, and able to work well in different settings. The monitor must establish trust with the students and their families, sometimes becoming their lifeline and navigator through the school system. The monitor regularly checks on student attendance and academic performance, talks to the families and listens to students, checking and connecting throughout the year. The monitor also checks student engagement periodically using several indicators that include attendance, social/behavior performance, and academic performance.

Connect. Using indicators from the “check” procedures, the monitor can then “connect” using either basic or intensive interventions. Having two levels of response serves as a way to systematically respond to current and changing levels of individual student needs and maximize resources. All students receive basic interventions that are primarily comprised of purposeful conversations with the monitors once a month for secondary students and once a week for elementary students. The basic interventions are comprised of four strategies: (a) sharing general information with the student about the monitoring system, (b) providing regular feedback to the student about his or her progress at school, (c) regularly discussing staying in school (and emphasizing accurate associated benefits), and (d) problem solving with the student about risk factors. At least monthly, students receive instruction and practice in a five step cognitive-behavioral problem-solving strategy:

1. Stop, think about the problem.
2. What are some choices?
3. Choose one.
4. Do it.
5. How did it work?

Students showing high risk on any of the indicators being monitored, such as suspension from school or failing classes receive intensive interventions. As soon as a student shows increased risk, the monitor takes immediate actions to reconnect the student to school. The monitor also taps existing support services when needed and appropriate and increases the degree of interaction with the student, including calling the student and parent in the morning to make sure the student gets out of bed and gets to school. Intensive intervention strategies include:

- **Problem solving:** hold sessions with student social skills groups, parents, and students exhibiting high-risk behaviors to develop individualized behavior contracts for students; negotiate alternatives to out-of-school suspensions; and provide family mediation services for truancy.
- **Academic support:** connect students with a student or mentor; draft individualized contracts with students, meet with teachers regarding areas of student concern, and initiate changes in students’ class schedules as needed.
- **Recreation and community service exploration:** raise awareness about afterschool activities, help students fill out application forms, accompany students to neighborhood programs, set up a community service tutoring program, and help students arrange for summer jobs or a structured schedule of activities.

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The authors of this practice document are part of the Exchange Team of Experts at the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities at Clemson University.

Additional Resources

Effective interventions in dropout prevention: An overview of cognitive-behavioral interventions by the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities

Effective interventions in dropout prevention: A research synthesis—The effects of cognitive-behavioral interventions on dropout for youth with disabilities by Brian Cobb, Pat Sample, Morgen Alwell, & Nikole Johns, Colorado State University

Copies of these resources may be downloaded free of charge from our Website, www.dropoutprevention.org.

If you would like additional information about the development of cognitive behavioral interventions, contact The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities, 209 Martin Street, Clemson, SC 29631-1555; 864-656-2599; NDPCSD-L@clemson.edu; www.dropoutprevention.org/NDPC-SD.

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Reconnecting Youth. SAMHSA Model Program

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). *Reconnecting youth. SAMHSA Model Program*. Washington, DC: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <http://modelprograms.samhsa.gov/pdfs/FactSheets/Reconnecting.pdf>

Reconnecting Youth (RY) is a school-based prevention program for youth in grades 9 through 12 (14 to 18 years old) at risk for school dropout. These youth also may exhibit multiple behavior problems, such as substance abuse, aggression, depression, or suicide risk behaviors. Reconnecting Youth uses a partnership model involving peers, school personnel, and parents to deliver interventions that address the three central program goals:

- Decreased drug involvement
- Increased school performance
- Decreased emotional distress

Students work toward these goals by participating in a semester-long high school class that involves skills training in the context of a positive peer culture. RY students learn, practice, and apply self-esteem enhancement strategies, decision-making skills, personal control strategies, and interpersonal communication techniques.

Proven Results*

- 18% improvement in grades in all classes
- 7.5% increase in credits earned per semester
- 54% decrease in hard drug use
- 48% decrease in anger and aggression problems
- 32% decline in perceived stress
- 23% increase in self-efficacy

*Compared to students not participating in Reconnecting Youth

Intended Population

RY is highly effective with high school youth at risk for school dropout—defined as having fewer than the average number of credits earned for their grade level, high absenteeism, a significant drop in grades, or a history of dropping out of school. The program was developed and tested in the greater Seattle area and has been successfully implemented according to design in California, Colorado, Maine, Texas, and Washington. Students from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, living in suburban and urban settings, have benefited from the program.

Benefits

- Improved grades and school attendance
- Reduced drug involvement
- Decreased emotional distress
- Increased self-esteem, personal control, prosocial peer bonding, and social support

How It Works

Four key RY components are integrated into the school environment. They include:

- **RY Class**, a core element, is offered for 50 minutes daily during regular school hours for 1 semester (80 sessions) in a class with a student-teacher ratio of 10 or 12 to 1. After a 10-day orientation to the program, approximately 1 month is spent on each of these topics:

- Self-esteem
 - Decision making
 - Personal control
 - Interpersonal communication
- **School bonding activities** consisting of social, recreational, school, and weekend activities that are designed to reconnect students to school and health-promoting activities as alternatives to drug involvement, loneliness, and depression.
 - **Parental involvement**, required for student participation, is essential for at-home support of the skills students learn in RY class. School contact is maintained through notes and calls from teachers who also enlist parental support for activities and provide progress reports.
 - **School Crisis Response planning** provides teachers and school personnel with guidelines for recognizing warning signs of suicidal behaviors and suicide prevention approaches.

Implementation Essentials

From planning through implementation of the RY curriculum, partnerships with school officials are vital. Typical partners include the RY teacher, RY coordinator, parents, designated district representative, the principal, vice principal, student support services, staff, and administrative support staff—especially attendance and registrar. Regular meetings to ensure readiness, commitment, and financial resources will help set a strong foundation for successful replication.

Outcomes

Relative to controls, high-risk youth participating in RY evidenced:

Increased School Performance

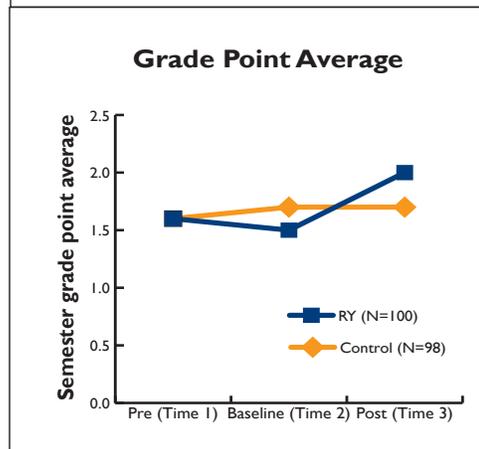
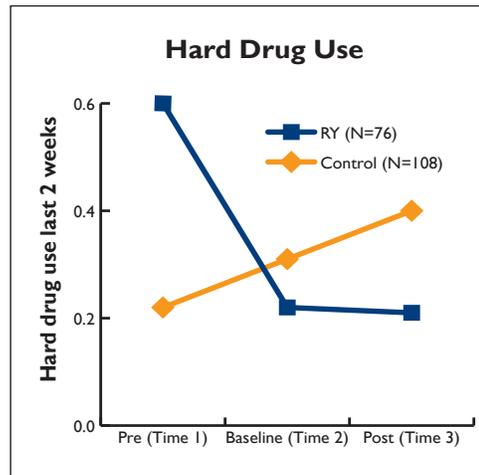
- Increased grades (GPA) in all classes
- Curbed increasing trend in daily class absences
- Increased credits earned per semester
- Decreased high school dropout

Decreased Drug Involvement

- Curbed progression of alcohol and other drug use
- Decreased drug-use control problems
- Decreased hard drug use
- Decreased adverse drug-use consequences

Decreased Emotional Distress

- Decreased suicidal behaviors (threats, thoughts, and attempts)
- Decreased anxiety and perceived stress
- Decreased depression and hopelessness
- Decreased anger control problems and aggression



Personnel

- One full-time RY coordinator per every five to six classes is needed to provide teacher support, encouragement, and consultation. The role typically includes bimonthly meetings as well as weekly classroom observation. The RY coordinator is hired and paid by the RY teacher funding source (e.g., school, independent agency). Ideally, the RY coordinator is a skilled RY teacher with supervisory and training expertise.
- RY teachers are selected, not assigned, using preestablished criteria to ensure the program has teachers who are committed to working with high-risk youth and show special aptitude based on student, other teacher, and administrative recommendations.

RY offers recommended selection criteria to identify potential participants. From this group, students should be invited rather than assigned to RY, and their parents must sign an agreement for them to participate. Students' expressed willingness to work toward program goals is essential.

Reconnecting Youth operates best in an environment with active supports. School administrators should secure links with community groups for involvement such as funding, "adoption" of a school to provide mentoring or in-kind donations, or help with providing drug-free activities.

Room, Equipment, and Supplies

A classroom large enough to accommodate the RY teacher and 10 to 12 students is necessary. Teachers will need a copy of the Reconnecting Youth: A Peer Group Approach to Building Life Skills curriculum and will need to prepare student notebooks from handouts contained therein. The curriculum can be obtained from the publisher. Please note that the curriculum cost is not included in training costs. Recreational and school-bonding activities, including transportation, will also need to be budgeted.

Training and Technical Assistance

To ensure best-results implementation fidelity, all RY teachers and coordinators should receive implementation training. Onsite implementation training for potential RY teachers and coordinators is available from RY personnel. Initial implementation training lasts 5 days. Followup implementation consultation of 1 day every 6 months during the first year of implementation plus phone consultation is recommended. At least one yearly followup consultation, to manage implementation challenges and to assess implementation fidelity in subsequent years, is also recommended.

Program Background

The development and framework for RY were largely informed by early descriptive work of Dr. Leona Eggert and her colleagues. Early work identified the vulnerabilities among youth at risk for high school dropout, "skippers," and the co-occurring problem behaviors of school deviance, drug involvement, and depression/suicidal behaviors. Reconnecting Youth was specifically designed to meet the participants' needs for inclusion and excitement while teaching them how to be "winners," stay in control, make wise decisions, and evaluate potential consequences of their choices. The program has been funded for testing by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), National Institutes of Health, U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Department of Education in suburban and urban areas of the Pacific Northwest. A two-semester version of the program, with a parent component, is currently being evaluated with funding from NIDA. RY has been adopted by Texas and Maine as an integral part of statewide prevention programming.

Evaluation Design

A quasi-experimental design with repeated measures was used to test the efficacy of the RY indicated preventive intervention. Trend analyses served to compare the pattern of change for experimental and control groups across pre- and posttests (5 months) and followup tests (5 to 7 months).

Program Developer

Leona Eggert, Ph.D., RN, FAAN. Over the past 15 years, Dr. Leona Eggert has led a team of prevention scientists in the Reconnecting Youth Prevention Research Program. They have designed and tested numerous programs to help high-risk youth increase their school performance, drug-use control, and mood management. Reconnecting Youth: A Peer Group Approach to Building Life Skills (RY) is an indicated school-based prevention program targeting potential high school dropouts. The program has received extensive funding from both NIDA and NIMH for testing the RY prevention model. Developers and authors Dr. Eggert and Ms. Liela Nicholas consult nationally and internationally on the implementation and evaluation of the program.

Contact Information

For training information:

Liela Nicholas, Co-developer and Principal RY Trainer
Phone: (425) 861-1177, Fax: (425) 861-8071

Copies of the curriculum can be obtained from the publisher:

Solution Tree (formerly NES)
304 West Kirkwood Avenue, Suite 2
Bloomington, IN 47404-5132
Phone toll-free: (800) 733-6786; Fax: (812) 336-7790
Website: <http://www.solution-tree.com/>
Cost of the curriculum is \$300 U.S. (plus shipping).

For program information:

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Web site: www.son.washington.edu/departments/pch/ry

Recognition

Model Program—Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Programs That Work—National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Grade “A” & “A+”—Drug Strategies, Inc.

New Approaches to Truancy Prevention in Urban Schools

Walls, Charles. (2003). *New approaches to truancy prevention in urban schools*. ERIC Digest. New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Teachers College, Columbia University. http://iume.tc.columbia.edu/eric_archive/digest/186.pdf

In New York City alone, it has been estimated that 150,000 of 1 million public school students are absent on a typical school day (Garry, 1996). Although the exact number is unknown, many of these absences are the result of truancy. No universal definition for truancy exists, but it is generally defined as a locally- determined number of absences from school without a legitimate excuse. Truancy is generally considered a major risk factor for dropping out of school and for delinquent behavior, including substance abuse, gang involvement, and criminal activity; these often lead to more serious problems in adult life. This digest will explore truancy in the urban context, examine the different types and reasons for truancy, and provide an overview of the new ways in which researchers and intervention programs have been addressing this problem.

The Urban and Minority Context

No national data on truancy rates exists, but many large cities report staggeringly high rates of truancy (Baker, Sigman, & Nugent, 2001); in general, larger schools have higher rates of truancy (Puzzanchera, Stahl, Finnegan, Tierney, and Snyder, 2003). The relationship between race and truancy is not well established, but the truancy data collected by the juvenile court system reveal that whites are underrepresented in petitioned truancy cases (Bell, Rosen, & Dynlacht, 1994; Puzzanchera et al., 2003). Students with the highest truancy rates are at higher risk of dropping out of school (Baker et al., 2001), and African Americans and Latinos consistently have the highest dropout rates (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001). The relationship between income and truancy is also not well established, but it is generally believed that students from lower income families have higher rates of truancy (Bell et al., 1994). The number of truancy cases is evenly divided between boys and girls, and the peak age for petitioned truancy cases is 15 (Puzzanchera et al., 2003).

Truancy: A Few Types and a Multitude of Reasons

Although cutting class and truancy are not generally thought of as synonymous, researchers have found that about 40 percent of extreme truancy cases in Chicago occur because of class cutting. They have also found that truants are often in and around school and that tardiness may also account for truancy. In general, then, two types of truants exist: those who cut or miss class and those who miss full days. Because of the cyclical nature of these absences, both types of truancy require early intervention (Roderick et al., 1997).

Many reasons, which have been generalized into four categories, explain why truants do not attend school (from Baker et al., 2001, unless otherwise indicated):

Family. These include lack of guidance or parental supervision, drug or alcohol abuse, lack of awareness of attendance laws, and differing views about education.

School. These include factors such as school environment (school size, attitudes of teachers, students, and administrators), an inability to engage the diverse cultural and learning styles of minority students, inconsistent attendance policies, and lack of meaningful consequences.

Economics. These include employed students, single-parent homes, a lack of affordable transportation and child care, high mobility rates, and parents with multiple jobs.

Student. Factors include drug and alcohol abuse, misunderstanding or ignorance of attendance laws, physical and emotional ill-health, lack of incentive (Bell et al., 1994), lack of school-engaged friends, and lack of proficiency in English (Rohrman, 1993).

Low academic achievement and weak basic skills are other major reasons for truancy, but even the highest achieving students may be labeled truants because they cut class. Warning signs are often evident in the elementary school years (Roderick et al.; Mogulescu and Segal, 2002). In many cases, the siblings of these students also have attendance problems and the use of family therapy has been strongly recommended and effective as a form of intervention (Sheverbush & Sadowski, 1994). For high school students, attendance problems begin early and worsen as the school year progresses; the transition to high school can be especially difficult. Schools that do not consistently challenge students, set and enforce high standards of behavior, and provide personal support encourage student disengagement (Roderick et al., 1997).

Multimodal Intervention Programs

One of the key features of truancy intervention is a collaborative, or multimodal, approach that involves some combination of community stakeholders: schools, juvenile courts, and law enforcement agencies, as well as parents, community organizations, and social services agencies (Baker et al., 2001; Bell et al., 1994; Mogulescu & Segal, 2002). This approach takes into account the many risk factors that underlie truancy.

Early prevention programs that focus on elementary school children view, as do most researchers, parents as responsible for their children's failure to attend school. The Truancy Prevention Through Mediation Program in Ohio invites parents to a mediation session after parental notifications fail to improve their children's attendance. During the mediation sessions stakeholders identify the reasons for truancy and agree on a plan of action. In Broward County, Florida, the Broward Truancy Intervention Program uses a computer system to track and notify parents of their children's absences. Subsequent actions include a conference with parents and, if necessary, misdemeanor charges against them.

Applying the principle that truancy is often a result of emotional, familial, and environmental factors, some middle and high school intervention programs use a continuum of increasingly intensive interagency participation to avoid court involvement. In Ramsey County, Minnesota, for example, the Truancy Intervention Program has three stages: (1) an informational meeting on the laws and legal consequences regarding truancy; (2) the collaboration of school representatives (including counselors), the assistant county attorney, parents, and students to create an attendance contract; (3) the filing of a petition to the juvenile court.

In instances where school-based interventions have failed and the truancy case has reached the court docket, judges may issue alternatives to standard court sanctions. Such programs allow

the court to target specific education and other needs of the child. In Atlanta, Georgia, the Truancy Intervention Program assigns a court-appointed volunteer attorney who supports and represents truant children of all grade levels; the court may impose supervision, counseling, and education programs. Seventy-five percent of these students avoid subsequent contact with the juvenile court (Mogulescu & Segal, 2002).

Court Intervention: A Special Role

The juvenile justice system is increasingly being used as a final stop and as a mechanism for intervening in truancy (Baker et al., 2001). It plays an important role in the collaborative effort to combat truancy, and in some states, such as New York, it is the first method of intervention. However, courts often do not effectively enforce truancy laws. Many families are not intimidated by courts insofar as truancy is concerned (Rohrman, 1993; American Bar Association [ABA], 2001). Removing parents from the home by sending them to jail or putting children in non-secure detention or foster care is often counterproductive, because such measures are traumatic for the families, highly cost-ineffective, and often take students out of school (Garry, 1996; Mogulescu & Segal, 2002; ABA, 2001).

The Truancy Diversion Programs in Louisville, Baltimore, and Phoenix represent a more effective use of the courts. They bring the court into the school and utilize its atmosphere of formality and consequence in a non-punitive manner. These programs work on three principles: (1) because truancy often emerges from family conditions, the courts identify and treat the underlying causes in the family; (2) because it is more productive to keep students in the school setting, the courts hold weekly mock court sessions on school premises and put families in regular contact with the judge; (3) because many people give up on truants, the court uses positive reinforcement of the participants' efforts, regardless of their failings (ABA, 2001).

Some truants continue to have problems with attendance despite these intervention efforts. The use of an alternative school that is designed specifically for truants may be a successful way to help them. The Dekalb Truancy School in Dekalb County, Georgia, for example, serves up to 75 court-referred students each semester. Students in this program have average or above-average intelligence but below-average academic skills; individualized instruction is a key feature of the program. The students also learn conflict management, problem-solving, leadership, and teamwork skills (McGiboney, 2001).

Conclusion

The programs featured in this digest help to reduce truancy and involvement with the juvenile court system; they are cost-effective and tailored to urban schools. However, no one program will accommodate the needs of every school and community. Urban schools, which have higher numbers of low-income and minority students, should develop truancy programs that address the social and cultural needs of these populations and maintain their efforts in a collaborative and multiagency setting. Evaluations reveal that this collaboration requires clearly defined roles and continuing, community-wide education, as well as data-driven methods to track its effectiveness (Baker et al., 2001). The payoff has been marked improvements for families, students, schools, and communities.

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Helping Middle School Students Make the Transition into High School.

Mizelle, N. (1999). *Helping middle school students make the transition into high school. ERIC Digest*. Champaign: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, University of Illinois. <http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/eearchive/digests/1999/mizell99.pdf>

Young adolescents entering high school look forward to having more choices and making new and more friends; however, they also are concerned about being picked on and teased by older students, having harder work, making lower grades, and getting lost in a larger, unfamiliar school (Mizelle, 1995; Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994).

As young adolescents make the transition into high school, many experience a decline in grades and attendance (Barone, Aguirre-Deandreis, & Trickett, 1991); they view themselves more negatively and experience an increased need for friendships (Hertzog et al., 1996); and by the end of 10th grade, as many as 6% drop out of school (Owings & Peng, 1992). For middle school students, including those who have been labeled “gifted” or “high-achieving,” the transition into high school can be an unpleasant experience (Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994).

Research has found, however, that when middle school students took part in a high school transition program with several diverse articulation activities, fewer students were retained in the transition grade (Maclver, 1990). Furthermore, middle school principals indicated that they expected fewer of their students to drop out before graduation when the school provided supportive advisory group activities or responsive remediation programs (Maclver & Epstein, 1991).

This Digest discusses how educators can ease students’ transition into high school by providing challenging and supportive middle school environments and by designing transition programs that address the needs of students and their parents and that facilitate communication between middle school and high school educators.

Middle School Environment

Providing young adolescents with activities that relate directly to their transition into high school certainly is important; however, providing young adolescents with a challenging and supportive middle school experience is an equally important factor in their making a successful transition into high school (Belcher & Hatley, 1994; Mizelle, 1995; Oates, Flores, & Weishew, 1998). For example, Mizelle (1995) found that students who stayed together with the same teachers through sixth, seventh, and eighth grades and experienced more hands-on, life-related learning activities, integrated instruction, and cooperative learning groups were more successful in their transition to high school than were students from the same school who had a more traditional middle school experience.

Students also indicated that if their middle school teachers had held students more responsible for their learning, taught them more about strategies for learning on their own, and provided them a more challenging curriculum, their transition to high school would have been eased.

Similarly, in a comprehensive program at Sunrise Middle School in inner-city Philadelphia, Oates and her colleagues (1998) found that students who participated in a Community for Learning Program (CFL) were more successful in their transition into high school than students who had not participated in the CFL program. Key components of the CFL program were support and training for teachers, a learning management system designed to help middle school students develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning and behavior, and an emphasis on community and family involvement.

Transition Programs

According to Maclver (1990), a high school transition program includes a variety of activities that (1) provide students and parents with information about the new school, (2) provide students with social support during the transition, and (3) bring middle school and high school personnel together to learn about one another's curriculum and requirements.

Activities That Provide Information to Students and Parents. Middle school students want to know what high school is going to be like, and they and their parents need to know about and understand high school programs and procedures (Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994). In particular, parents need to be actively involved in the decisions their eighth-graders are asked to make about classes they will take in ninth grade and understand the long-term effects of the course decisions (Paulson, 1994).

Some of the ways students can learn about high school include visiting the high school in the spring, perhaps to "shadow" a high school student; attending a presentation by a high school student or panel of students; visiting the high school in the fall for schedule information; attending a fall orientation assembly (preferably before school starts); and discussing high school regulations and procedures with eighth-grade teachers and counselors. In addition to face-to-face activities, another possible source of information is the Internet. High school students might, either as a class or club project, set up a Web page that would provide incoming students information on different high school activities and clubs and offer them an opportunity to get answers to any questions they may have from the "experts."

Activities That Provide Social Support. At a time when friendships and social interaction are particularly important for young adolescents, the normative transition into high school often serves to disrupt friendship networks and, thereby, interferes with students' success in high school (Barone et al., 1991). Thus, it is vital for a transition program to include activities that will provide incoming students social support activities that give students the opportunity to get to know and develop positive relationships with older students and other incoming students (Hertzog et al., 1996; Maclver, 1990). A "Big Sister/Brother" Program that begins in eighth grade and continues through ninth grade, a spring social event for current and incoming high school students, and writing programs where eighth-graders correspond with high school students are just a few ways that transition programs can provide students social support. Middle and high school educators should also look for opportunities to develop more long-term activities such as peer mentoring or tutoring programs.

Activities That Bring Middle and High School Educators Together. Underlying successful high school transition programs are activities that bring middle school and high school administrators, counselors, and teachers together to learn about the programs, courses,

curriculum, and requirements of their respective schools (Hertzog et al., 1996; Vars, 1998). Activities that create a mutual understanding of curriculum requirements at both levels and of the young adolescent learner will help educators at both levels to develop a high school transition program to meet the particular needs of their students. In addition to the more typical committee or team meetings with representatives from each level, these activities may include K-12 curriculum planning meetings, and teacher or administrator visitations, observations, and teaching exchanges.

Parent Involvement

The importance of parents being involved in their young adolescent students' transition from middle to high school can hardly be overestimated. When parents are involved in their student's transition to high school, they tend to stay involved in their child's school experiences (Maclver, 1990); and when parents are involved in their child's high school experiences, students have higher achievement (Linver & Silverberg, 1997; Paulson, 1994), are better adjusted (Hartos & Power, 1997), and are less likely to drop out of school (Horn & West, 1992).

Parent involvement in the transition process to high school can be encouraged through a variety of activities. Parents may be invited to participate in a conference (preferably at the middle school) with their child and the high school counselor to discuss course work and schedules, visit the high school with their child in the spring or in the fall, spend a day at the high school to help them understand what their child's life will be like, and help design and facilitate some of the articulation activities for students. In planning activities for parents, high school educators will want to remember that parents of students who are already in high school are an excellent resource for other parents and may also help to encourage new parents to be more involved in school activities. At the middle school level, teachers and administrators can inform parents about transition activities and encourage them to participate. Perhaps more importantly, they can work to keep parents involved in their child's education and school activities during the middle school years so that they are comfortable "coming to school" and confident that their involvement makes a difference in their child's academic success.

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