

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## *The Dropout Crisis*

This Document provides a brief summation of three key documents addressing dropout prevention: The Institute of Education Sciences “Dropout Prevention” September 2008, The Third Mile Group’s “Standards, Dropout Rates and Increasing High School Completion Rates,” by Katy Anthes, Ph.D. and “Addressing the Dropout Crisis” produced by NASBE.

The Wyoming Department of Education

7/13/2009



## FROM IES: DROPOUT PREVENTION SEPTEMBER 2008

This article provides educators and education administrators with research-based recommended practices for the improvement of the nation's dropout rates. The document focused on interventions, practices and reformation techniques that have had positive results in decreasing high school dropouts. The authors were a panel of experts in education and research methodology. They made six recommendations for addressing dropout rates as well as possible tools and methods for implementing those recommendations.

Recommendation 1: "Utilized data systems that support a realistic diagnosis of the number of students who drop out and that help identify students at high risk of dropping out." - low level of evidence in support.

Collect and monitor real student data often. Dropout interventions can be matched to the scope of the problem and schools can accurately identify specific students who are at-risk of dropping out.

Recommendation 2: "Assign adult advocates to students at risk of dropping out (targeted intervention)" - Moderate level of evidence in support.

Students with ongoing relationships with adults feel a greater sense of membership and involvement.

Roadblocks include: insufficient funding and resources, staff resistance and lack of student desire to participate.

Recommendation 3: "Provide academic support and enrichment to improve academic performance (targeted intervention)" – moderate level of evidence in support

Students with academic supports show improved academic performance and engagement. Research shows that tutoring or enrichment programs help address skill gaps and offset frustration caused by low academic performance, absenteeism and grade retention that can lead to dropping out.

Roadblocks include: lack of students wanting to participate, no time in the school day to add academic programs, and lack of tutors available.

Recommendation 4: "Implement programs to improve students' classroom behavior and social skills (targeted intervention)." – Low level of evidence in support

Disruptive behavior is correlated with dropout rates. Schools can help decrease this behavior if they provide opportunities for students to identify, understand and control their emotions and interactions with others.

Roadblocks include: limited resources, stereotyping of at-risk kids, the "those kids can't be helped" attitude

Recommendation 5: "Personalize the learning environment and instructional process (school wide intervention)" – moderate level of evidence in support

Large schools can alienate students and cause them to become uninterested to the point of dropping out. Student engagement improved when in a supportive and caring environment.

Roadblocks include: staff resistance and staff turnover

Recommendation 6: “Provide rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning and provide the skills needed to graduate and serve them after they leave the school” – moderate level of evidence

Schools can implement reforms aimed at improving instruction to ensure students have necessary skills to complete high school as well as succeed in college and the workplace.

Roadblocks include: staff resisting CTE integrated into curricula, state standards and college admission requirements discourage integration of CTE, students’ lack of interest.

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## From “Standards, Dropout Rates and Increasing High School Completion Rates” Policy Brief Prepared for the Wyoming State Board of Education by Katy Anthes, Ph.D

The Wyoming Department of Education contracted with the Third Mile Group to review effective practices and policies on decreasing the dropout rate. They concluded that Wyoming has made progress in the efforts to decrease the dropout rate, but there is still work to be done. This is particularly true in when looking at the issue from a regional standpoint as dropout rates vary throughout Wyoming.

Each year, one-third of public high school students fail to graduate. In Wyoming, the graduation rate is between 76.7 to 79.5 percent. The national average is 74.7 percent. Wyoming Males had a lower rate of graduation than females (71% and 78.1%).

The Definition of a dropout in Wyoming is defined as “someone who: (1) was enrolled in a school at some time during the previous school year, (2) was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year and (3) has not graduated from high school or completed a state or district approved educational program and (4) does not meet any of the known exclusionary conditions.”

Research shows that without the proper support, increasing the standard does not improve dropout rates.

The likelihood of a student dropping out can be based on several freshman year performance indicators including: absences for the year, GPA, course failures in a semester, and On-track vs. Off-track. Other factors or indicators of a drop out are student boredom, lack of challenging material and lack of engagement. Thus, a key strategy for improvement should include increased rigor in curriculum and coursework, increased instructional support, clearly defined expectations and goals and recognition for student achievement.

High schools that are consistently rated as high performing cite several strategies common to high-performing schools include:

- Focused professional development opportunities for educators that support a culture of collaboration
- Educators who embrace broader learning objectives than just their own subject matter and use differentiated strategies to reach students at all levels
- Teachers who interpret student achievement data to make decisions about teaching
- Recognition of student and teacher achievement

Higher academic standards are often part of a high-stakes accountability system but the system as a whole must be aligned toward the overall goal of increasing student achievement.

Because studies point to some clear indicators that predict dropout behavior, schools and districts can address these factors with interventions that increase high school completion rates. The National Center for School Engagement has a simple and clear framework called the three A’s: Attendance, Attachment and Achievement.

Many school and district dropout prevention programs incorporate elements of these strategies. This document discusses eight specific programs that have substantial outcome data – and that warrant inclusion in the What Works Clearinghouse.

States provide standards, accountability systems, requirements for educator professional development and resources to schools and districts in their dropout prevention efforts. Dropout prevention that states can employ include the following:

- Create data systems that help educators track the indicators that predict student dropouts. Link those databases to strategies and programs that have been proven to work.
- Provide universal early childhood education.
- Ensure an early reading focus in elementary standards and curriculum.
- Consider adolescent literacy needs in middle school curriculum and standards.
- Consider how to create meaningful smaller learning communities either in the development of new schools or the redesign of current ones.
- Ensure relevance and rigor in the curriculum of high schools and hold high schools accountable to this standard.
- Stop academic tracking and include high rigor and expectations for all students
- Coordinate state social and health services to support other aspects of low SES students.
- Ensure high-quality teacher and leader preparation at all levels of the system – including high school.
- Require high-quality induction and professional development for educators – teachers and leaders – at all levels of the system linked to student learning needs.

Document outlines Policy Actions Available and Appropriate for the Wyoming State Board of Education include: Early-warning data systems should be designed in conjunction with existing data and reporting systems and use accurate data to help assess problems in schools and apply appropriate interventions. The following should be included in the system:

- Risk factors by individual students
- Aggregate risk factors by school and type of school
- Rates in decline in academic achievement and engagement (as indicated by attendance and behavior)
- School level outcomes (on track by grade, off-track recovery rates and graduation rates)
- System wide analysis of student characteristics, risk factors, outcomes and impact of interventions.
- Tracking indicators does no good unless teachers and school leaders review and analyze the data and apply interventions based on what the data are telling them.

The document highlights several initiatives taken by other states that include:

- State initiatives to improve the 9th-grade year.
- State initiatives to improve the senior year.
- Outreach (state-funded initiatives to ensure students are well-prepared).
- Initiatives that require students to create long-term plans (i.e., five-year plan, declaration of major, etc.)
- States that subsidize testing fees for the ACT, SAT, PLAN, PSAT, etc.
- States that require or authorize the use of e-transcripts

## From The State Education Standard

### The Journal of the National Association of the State Board of Education

#### “Addressing the Dropout Crisis”

This Brief charges educators, particularly educational administrators and policy makers to spearhead policy making to reduce the dropout rate across the country. 1.2 million students drop out of school every year which essentially costs the nation roughly \$329 billion over the course of their lifetimes. This does not include the social cost of government support and incarceration – which notably increase among high school dropouts.

Dropout rates are primarily found in urban and poor rural communities serving disproportionate numbers of students living in poverty who are African American and Latino. Eighty percent of the nation’s high schools produce the largest number of dropouts are concentrated in 15 states. This study notes that while these numbers are alarming, only 20 percent of American high school students attend a school with a graduation rate of 90% or higher. The brief warns that work on rigorous standards is futile if there are no policies to help all students meet them.

The brief provides ideas and suggestions on how state boards of education can align their policies around content, performance and access while advocating resources. They can also adopt the position that anything less than high school completion with a meaningful diploma is unacceptable for any student.

Article 1 – Do we have what it takes to put all students on the graduation path? This article addresses the following: creation of systemic priorities for ending the dropout crisis within the local community.

Article 2- Research-based Strategies and Best Practices for Dropout Prevention. This article provides several evidence-based strategies, programs and models for dropout prevention.

Article 3 – A State Policy Model to Address the Nation’s Dropout Crisis. This article provides elements for consideration when drafting educational policy relating to dropout rates including: alignment of policies and strategies supports for all student needs, engagement of stakeholders, state board of education leadership and capacity and sustainability of the policies.

Article 4 – Practitioners’ Perspectives. New Strategy to Lower Dropout Rates Shows Promise (a Superintendent’s Perspective). This article focuses on the Portland Public School System’s struggle with dropout rates and information it gained from cohort studies. The article also addressed best practices for dropout rates among English Language Learners

Article 5 – Health and Student Attendance. Considerations for Dropout Prevention. Multiple student absences from school characteristically precede failure to graduate. This article describes the thinking behind why some students have multiple sick days during school-age years, the frustration it induces in educators and how schools can best address the problem of illness related absences to ensure that they don’t lead to school failure.

Article 6 – Faces of Dropout, How the student populations are faring with graduation rates. This article addresses the English language learner population and how it has contributed to dropout rates.

Article 7 - The Dropout Problem in Rural America - Article focuses on an often overlooked population of dropouts. Article includes demographics on rural dropouts, reasons, resources and recommendations related to this particular population of the nation’s students who fail to graduate high school.