

13. AT-RISK AND DROPOUT PREVENTION

A. EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS. District leaders ensure that a process is in place to analyze early warning data to identify students at-risk of dropping out of high school.

i. The district and individual schools use an early warning data system or an intervention team process to identify students at-risk of academic failure.

Issues related to attendance, behavior, and course completion or “ABC” are major predictors of dropout. Early warning systems consider these and other data to determine the risk for individual students. A building intervention team, or student support team, identifies and supports students who exhibit academic or behavioral problems by providing early systematic assistance to students and connecting them to appropriate interventions and supports (OPEPD, 2017).

ii. High schools conduct credit checks for all students to determine whether each student is on-track to graduate.

Research shows that students who are on-track to graduate at the end of their freshman year are far more likely to graduate than those who are not on track at the end of their freshman year (Achieve, 2018).

iii. The district recognizes dropping out of school as a process rather than an event. Monitoring and intervention begins in early elementary.

While dropping out occurs during high school, disengagement, chronic absenteeism, behavioral issues, and low achievement start long before high school. Consequently graduation rate must be a concern at all grade levels, not just secondary (ECS, 2017).

B. DROPOUT PREVENTION STRATEGIES. District leaders ensure that evidence-based dropout prevention strategies are embedded throughout the system.

i. The district has incorporated evidence-based dropout prevention strategies throughout the system.

Many factors affect dropout - for example, poor academic performance in elementary, middle, and high school; a low sense of belonging in school; negative classroom behavior; and little involvement in extracurricular activities (Jacobson, 2018) The National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) identified 15 effective strategies. They are: Systemic Approach (i.e. viewing dropout as a system issue); School-Community Collaboration; Safe Learning Environments; Family Engagement; Early Childhood Education; Early Literacy Development; Mentoring/Tutoring; Service-Learning; Alternative Schooling; After-School/Out-of-School Opportunities; Professional Development (i.e. related to at-risk students); Active Learning; Educational Technology; Individualized Instruction; and Career and Technical Education. School climate is highly correlated to dropout prevention (NDPC, 2108).

ii. The district provides intensive intervention for low student performance and provides credit recovery options.

Intervening with students who are experiencing difficulties at all levels has a huge impact on graduation rate. Credit recovery courses, and competency-based advancement can benefit students who have already lost credit (OPEPD, 2017).

iii. The district has structures in place to promote shared responsibility for all students, and has implemented processes to reduce barriers to learning.

Poverty-related factors that negatively impact students' ability to learn include health and well-being, limited literacy and language development, access to material resources, and level of mobility. Knowledge of these factors can lead to "an understanding of the differentiation, scaffolding, and support [high poverty] students may need to meet high expectations" (Parrett & Budge, 2016).

14. SCHOOL CULTURE, CLIMATE, AND SAFETY

A. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT. District leaders ensure that safe, supportive conditions are in place that enable collaboration, innovation, professional growth and learning for all students and adults in all schools.

i. The district has defined key elements of culture and climate, and has processes in place to ensure that these elements are in place across the district.

Climate is the school's effect on students, and *Culture* is how teachers and other staff members work together and the set of beliefs, values, and assumptions they share. Climate and culture impact students' ability to learn (ASCD, n.d.). Research from the National School Climate Center highlights four main dimensions of school climate: safety, relational (e.g., adult and student support), teaching and learning, and environmental (e.g., school connectedness) (NSCC, 2012).

ii. The district assesses climate through surveys or other methods, and the results are used to monitor and improve district and school processes.

There are many instruments available to collect and report school climate data. The WDE makes available a 24 question student climate survey which uses a Likert Scale to measure student perceptions related to trust, respect, support and high expectations. This survey is a required component of accountability for alternative schools, and may be administered to all students in a school or district.

iii. The district and all schools ensure physical safety, including training, a current crisis management plan, and routine practice drills.

The Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (VSTAG) is the only K-12 crisis management model supported by controlled studies. This evidence-based model is used in conducting threat assessments in K-12 schools. Dr. Dewey Cornell and colleagues at the University of Virginia have extensively tested the model through field tests and controlled studies for more than 20 years. Some of the national programs (e.g. Sandy Hook Promise) are based on the VSTAG model (UV, 2018).

B. TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS. Teachers maintain positive personal relationships with all students while consistently pressing each student to do their best work.

i. Processes are in place (i.e. social-emotional skill training for teachers) that lead to positive relationships between teachers and students.

The behavior of the teacher is central to positive relationships between teachers and students. A difficult-to-teach child does not justify negative behavior on the part of the teacher. Punishment, criticism, shouting, sarcasm, belittlement or rudeness on the part of the teacher can result in school avoidance, unwillingness to undertake school tasks, decreases in prosocial behavior and increased aggressive behavior on the part of the student. Training in teacher relationship skills can result in increased student achievement for years after the intervention (Hattie & Yates, 2014).

ii. Processes are in place to raise expectations and discontinue teacher practices that reflect low expectations or that are a deterrent to learning.

“High expectation is both a belief about student capability and specific actions undertaken to make those beliefs a reality. Teachers who demonstrate the highest expectations show students they expect rigorous, challenging, high quality work” (Williamson, 2012). In his classic article, *A Pedagogy of Poverty*, Haberman cites decades of observations in which he contends many teachers in high-poverty schools alter their methods to a more authoritarian approach focused on basic skills with little opportunity for student engagement or higher-level learning (Haberman, 1991).

iii. Structures and processes are in place to ensure interpersonal connectedness and support for each student by at least one caring adult in the school.

Students who feel connected to at least one significant adult in their education experience greater engagement and satisfaction with school. Students say they learn more, attend school more often, and perform better academically. The “triad” of student engagement is interpersonal connectedness, physical and emotional safety, and academic engagement (Blum).

15. STUDENT ACTIVITIES

A. ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES. Leaders and staff encourage all students to participate in clubs, organizations, field trips, and school-sponsored events that extend learning beyond the classroom.

i. The district provides resources, buildings, and transportation for activities, and opportunities for all students to participate in a wide range of activities.

Almost all middle level and high schools in the United States offer activities ranging from athletics, music, and drama to honor societies, clubs, service learning, and student councils (NASSP, 2018) Activities positively contribute to school climate. Activities promote school belonging and allow opportunities for students to become involved. Activities can engage members of the school community (e.g., teachers, coaches, parents), incorporate skills for success (e.g. teamwork, collaboration) and create positive relationships between students and among students and adults (Martinez, Coker, McMahon, Cohen, & Thapa, 2016).

ii. The district and schools use activity participation data as a measure of school culture and implement strategies to improve activity participation.

According to 2012 data, nationally 44% of students participate in sports, 21% in music, 21% in hobby clubs (e.g. photography, chess) and 16% in Career Technical Organizations (e.g. FFA, FBLA). (Martinez, Coker, McMahon, Cohen, & Thapa, 2016).

iii. The district pays coaches and sponsors and has a clearly defined process for adding new clubs, organizations, or teams.

Wyoming districts typically have a full or part-time activities director. Coaches and sponsors are paid through a contract. Presumably new teams, clubs and organizations will ultimately want paid sponsors and access to resources in a manner consistent with existing activities. Consequently, district leaders should have a process for approval or denial of requests to add activities.

B. ATHLETIC ACTIVITIES. Leaders and staff encourage all students to participate in team sports and formal athletic activities.

i. The district encourages participation by all students and ensures that fees are not a barrier to participation.

Funding for activities has traditionally been through budget allocations, fundraising, and vending machine revenues. Reduced budgets and less vending machines have reduced revenues for activities nationwide. Some schools address the deficit by charging participation fees or dues. This practice raises questions of equity of opportunity (NASSP, 2018). Wyoming districts must allow activity participation by all school aged children residing in the district, regardless of whether they are enrolled in a school in the district (e.g. home school students).

ii. The district and schools recognize and celebrate success in sports and other student activities through social media and assemblies.

Social media and assemblies can promote positive happenings in school, including student success in activities. Also, student ambassador programs are often used to promote the school in the community. Assemblies designed to promote support for sports teams and other activities, as well as those to recognize other student accomplishment can have a positive impact on school climate (Danielson, 2002).

iii. The district encourages students, fans, and supporters to model appropriate conduct at local events and while traveling.

For example, schools may participate in the Wyoming High School Activities Association "Join the RIDE!" initiative which includes: **R**espect; **I**ntegrity; **D**edication; and **E**ncouragement. Administrators, coaches, spectators, participants and officials all play a role in good sportsmanship (WHSAA, 2018).

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