

Technical Assistance Response on Dropout Prevention

Question:

How are states or districts improving graduation rates of students receiving special education services?

Below is a list of identified states and districts that have improved graduation rates for students receiving special education services. Additionally, a summary of each state's or district's dropout prevention program is provided along with a Web site for additional information.

Georgia Department of Education

<http://www.gadoe.org/>

Overview

The dropout prevention work in Georgia has improved the graduation rate for students in both special education and general education, with an increase from 63.0 percent in 2002 to 72.3 percent in 2007. Superintendent Kathy Cox says that the state is heavily focused on raising the graduation rate and attributes much of the improvement she sees to several programs in particular, including Graduation Coaches, a new curriculum that focuses on the relevance of core content areas as well as career and technical education, and alternative schools. (National High School Center description)

- ◆ Graduation Coaches are already in nearly every high school and will be placed in most Georgia middle schools next school year. The coaches are building relationships and using data to identify students who are at risk for dropping out and helping them stay on track toward graduation.
- ◆ The state's new curriculum is still being implemented and provides more rigor, focus, and relevance in the core areas of mathematics, English, social studies, and science.
- ◆ The changes to Georgia's Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education programs will ensure that students are seeing the relevance of what they are learning and can translate that into the work place.
- ◆ Georgia is continuing to embrace innovation by providing different options for learning, from charter schools to career academies to virtual schools. One-size-fits-all is not an option in the 21st century. (Georgia Department of Education description)

For more information, see the Georgia Department of Education Web site:
http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/pea_communications.aspx?ViewMode=1&obj=1404.

Graduation/Dropout Prevention Project

This project is a major component of a five-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education focused on improving graduation rates for students at risk and for students with disabilities. The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities trains school leadership teams to analyze the priority needs for their own school and determine which research-based strategies in dropout prevention will have the most impact on their school's graduation rate. The Dropout Prevention Center will then focus professional learning on the strategies targeted by the school team: academic performance, behavior/social skills, or transition planning/vocational assessment for students with disabilities. Faculty from the Dropout Prevention Center will provide four days of training during the first year, along with on-site coaching and support from a local Collaboration Coach (CC). The CC, trained by the Center, will support the leadership team in effectively implementing the selected strategies. At-risk students without disabilities may benefit from implementation of the strategies as well. (Georgia Department of Education description)

For more information, see the Georgia Department of Education Web site:
<http://www.gaspedg.com/gdpp.htm>.

Minnesota Department of Education <http://education.state.mn.us/mde/index.html>

Overview

Minnesota has established five goals related to decreasing students dropping out and increasing student graduation rates:

- ◆ Develop a comprehensive dropout prevention model for implementation at high school and middle school levels
- ◆ Develop student-level and school environment assessment tools that can be used to enhance the development and implementation of effective programming
- ◆ Increase statewide and local coordination to address dropout prevention
- ◆ Provide support and technical assistance for local education agencies
- ◆ Increase the likelihood of continued implementation of successful dropout prevention components and sustainability of grant success beyond the funding period (Minnesota Department of Education description)

For more information, see an overview of the program at the Minnesota Department of Education's Web site (<http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/Dropout/documents/Announcement/031591.pdf>), and a summary of the 10 strategies employed (<http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/Dropout/documents/Announcement/010795.pdf>).

Dropout Prevention Initiative Dropout Prevention Strategies and Programming

The Minnesota Department of Education's Dropout Prevention Initiative is using 10 effective dropout prevention strategies (identified by the National Dropout Prevention Center) as a framework that can be used to assist educators, administrators, community members, and parents with promoting student engagement in school and raising rates of graduation. Emphasis is placed on tailoring programming within the strategy areas to meet community, school, and student needs. The ten strategies follow:

- ◆ Professional Development
- ◆ School-Community Collaboration
- ◆ Family Engagement
- ◆ Safe Learning Environments
- ◆ Active/Individualized Learning
- ◆ Literacy Development
- ◆ Mentoring/Tutoring
- ◆ After-School Opportunities
- ◆ Service-Learning
- ◆ Alternative

Participating districts follow a process that includes developing a comprehensive dropout prevention plan using interventions to support student success at a variety of levels. The three-tiered model provides a structure for thinking about the provision of prevention and intervention supports at the universal (primary), secondary, and tertiary levels. To the extent possible, programs selected for use are evidence-based or are based on a foundation of relevant research.

- ◆ **Universal/Primary Level of Intervention:** This primary prevention approach incorporates interventions that are implemented with all students regardless of the presence of risk factors. The cost per student is typically lower than for interventions delivered at the secondary or tertiary levels. Specific examples are student advisory programs that monitor academic and social development of middle or high school students, deliberate outreach efforts to involve students in extracurricular activities, and systematic school wide positive discipline and behavioral support programs. Interventions at this level can be used to establish a strong foundation for connecting children and youth to school and learning and preventing dropout.

- ◆ **Secondary Level of Prevention:** An intervention provided at the secondary or selected level provides more intensive supports to some students who have been identified as being at risk of dropping out of school. The process of disengaging from school may have begun as evidenced by low or failing grades, poor attendance, or suspensions. Approaches may be implemented with small groups and may include skill building focused on conflict resolution, academic tutoring, or social skills—to address factors that are associated with increased risk of dropping out.
- ◆ **Tertiary Level of Prevention:** Tertiary prevention incorporates interventions that are considered indicated or targeted—that is, the intervention is designed to address the needs of a small percentage of (few) students who are at high risk and are showing clear signs of leaving school early. Often, these students may be at risk as evidenced by the presence of multiple risk factors. Indicated interventions at the tertiary level include approaches designed to remediate established problems. These interventions are typically highly individualized and are usually more costly. Approaches may include wrap-around services, individual functional behavior analysis, individualized behavior management plans, or intensive mentoring programs. (Adapted from Minnesota Department of Education description)

For more information, see the Minnesota Department of Education Web site:

<http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/Dropout/documents/Announcement/034990.pdf>.

New Hampshire's APEX II Initiative

<http://www.ed.state.nh.us/education/>

The New Hampshire Department of Education has been awarded a three-year (2006–08) dropout prevention grant, called APEX II (Achievement in Dropout Prevention and Excellence). This project builds on a previous dropout prevention and school improvement program (APEX I) that was implemented in 2002–05 in Franklin and Manchester, New Hampshire. APEX I demonstrated the promise of strategically combining three powerful school improvement models to reduce dropouts, improve individual student success, and improve overall school climate:

- ◆ Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a systemic, data driven behavioral support and improvement process
- ◆ Rehabilitation, Empowerment, Natural supports, Education and Work (RENEW), an intensive individualized school-to-career service for the most at risk students
- ◆ A Student Leadership Process, including a student-led needs assessment and action project program where students work with PBIS Universal Teams to participate in the assessment and improvement of school climate, safety, and learning

From April 2006 through December 2008, APEX II worked with students, families, teachers, and administrators at 10 high schools and their sending middle schools to implement a system of student, teacher, and school supports intended to enable all students to be successful in high school.

This project offered three levels of support for the schools:

- ◆ **Schoolwide:** At this level, the APEX staff helped the schools to evaluate and redesign their discipline systems using a Positive Behavioral Supports model (PBS). Staff members worked with the schools to form a Leadership Team (Universal Team), assess the school's current behavior profile, redesign the school's behavioral expectations, sharpen the school's data collection and retrieval system, and design and implement school wide interventions to benefit every student in the school. In selected schools, the leadership efforts included the development of student-led data collection and student leadership development so that a diverse representation of "opinion leaders" could be part of the school's Universal PBS team.
- ◆ **Targeted:** At this level of intervention, a team of specialists and administrators focused on students who exhibited challenging behaviors and who were at risk for school failure owing to academic, social, or behavioral issues. The goal of this team was to design interventions for the student or group of students based on a functional and contextual assessment. These function-based interventions have proved highly effective in reducing problem behaviors and the associated negative consequences. This level of project intervention included working with middle school staffs to identify and help specific at-risk 8th grade students to transition to the 9th grade in a positive way.
- ◆ **Individual Student:** RENEW facilitators employed by the APEX project worked with staff members at each high school and specialists from community-based organizations to identify individual students who were struggling to complete their program or who had already dropped out. Individualized teams were formed for each student and were trained to develop individualized, student-directed school-to-career plans using an evidence-based practice called RENEW (Rehabilitation, Empowerment, Natural supports, Education and Work). (Adapted from New Hampshire Department of Education description)

For more information, see the New Hampshire Department of Education Web site (<http://iod.unh.edu/apex.html>) or the National High School Center Web site (http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/Snapshot_DropoutPreventionNewHampshire_031307_2.pdf).

NOTE: Since the original technical assistance response was developed, other more recent resources may be available on our Web site: www.betterhighschools.org.