

Technical Assistance Response on Dropout Prevention

Question:

What are some examples of dropout prevention models that use a tiered approach?

Dropout prevention models have been developed that organize specific strategies or programs into tiers on the basis of the intensity of the interventions. Below, three such models are identified and described. Generally, the models have a two- or three-tier intervention system in which level 1 addresses all students, level 2 addresses small groups of students with common needs (sometimes individual students) with moderately intensive interventions, and level 3 addresses individual students with the most intensive interventions. A summary table of the three existing models is also available for easy comparisons. This is followed by considerations for adaptation or adoption and an annotated bibliography of related resources.

Tiered Models

New Hampshire's APEX II

The New Hampshire APEX II (Achievement in Dropout Prevention and Excellence) model has three levels of support for students:

- ◆ **Schoolwide:** At this level, the APEX staff help schools evaluate and redesign their discipline systems using a Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) model. Staff members work with 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 schoolwide interventions that will benefit every student in the school. In selected schools, the leadership efforts will include the development of student-led data collection and student leadership development so that a diverse representation of "opinion leaders" can be part of the school's Universal PBS Team.
- ◆ **Targeted:** At this level of intervention, a team of specialists and administrators focuses on students who exhibit challenging behaviors and who are at risk for school failure owing to academic, social, or behavioral issues. The goal of this team is to design interventions for the student or group of students based on a functional and contextual assessment. These "function-based" interventions have been proven highly effective in the reduction of problem behaviors and the associated negative consequences. This level of project intervention includes working with middle school staffs to identify and help specific at-risk eighth-grade students to transition to the ninth grade in a positive way.

- ◆ **Individual Student:** RENEW (Rehabilitation, Empowerment, Natural supports, Education and Work) facilitators are employed by the APEX project to work with staff members at each high school and specialists from community-based organizations to identify individual students who are struggling to complete their program or who have already dropped out. Individualized teams are formed for each student and are trained to develop individualized, student-directed school-to-career plans using the RENEW evidence-based practice.

The APEX project also includes the development and support of a student leadership team (in schools that have adopted PBIS) to gather information about school culture and climate from a variety of perspectives, to ensure that the voices of all students are part of the schoolwide Universal Team implementation process, and to develop better communication and understanding among students, faculty, administrators, and other stakeholders.

For more information, see the University of New Hampshire 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).

Communities in Schools

Based on the work of Linton, Moser, Holden, & Siegel (2006), Communities in Schools, Inc. (CIS) advocates two levels of service for students:

- ◆ **Level One** services are “**primary prevention**” programs that are widely accessible services. They are short-term, last for a few hours or days, and are open to all students. These types of services include general assemblies, health screenings, and career fairs that target risk factors for all youth at a site.
- ◆ **Level Two** services are “selected prevention/intervention” or “indicated intervention” programs that are targeted to the specific needs of students and/or families and are sustained over a period of time.
 - **Selected prevention/intervention** programs target certain groups of students considered to be at greater risk of dropping out or developing antisocial behavior. For example, a tutoring program targeted to all students at risk of failing courses but not yet failing is considered a selected prevention/intervention program.
 - **Indicated intervention programs** target youth already exhibiting early signs of leaving school or antisocial behavior. Therefore, a tutoring program designed for students who are already failing or who were retained because of course failure is considered an indicated intervention.

For more information, see the National Dropout Prevention Center Web site: http://www.dropoutprevention.org/resource/major_reports/communities_in_schools/Dropout%20Risk%20Factors%20and%20Exemplary%20Programs%20FINAL%205-16-07.pdf.

Minnesota’s Three-Tiered Model

Minnesota has developed a three-tiered dropout prevention model for students:

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- ◆ **Universal Level:** This primary prevention level includes all youth, at a low cost per individual. Examples are student advisory programs, efforts to engage students in extracurricular activities, school-to-work programs, and systematic positive discipline programs.
- ◆ **Selected Level:** This prevention/intervention level comprises about 15% of youth, including those who are identified as being at risk of dropping out, at a moderate cost per individual. These programs work to build specific skills (e.g., problem solving, anger control, interpersonal communication), a school-within-a-school model, or mentoring programs.
- ◆ **Targeted Level:** This indicated intervention level includes 5% of youth exhibiting clear signs of early school leaving, at a higher cost per individual. Programs include specific individualized behavior plans, intensive wrap-around services, alternative programs that provide parenting education classes, and on-site daycare for pregnant and parenting youth who have not completed school. The state advocates the use of Check and Connect at this level (for more information see <http://ici.umn.edu/checkandconnect/>).

For more information, see the Minnesota Department of Education Web site (<http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/Dropout/documents/Presentation/030982.pdf>) or Balfanz, Herzog, & Maclver (2007) at the National Forum Web site (<http://www.mgforum.org/News/MembersSpeak/Article-Maclver.pdf>).

Summary Table: Tiered Dropout Interventions

Model	Level 1: All Students	Level 2: Small Student Groups	Level 3: Individual Students
New Hampshire's APEX II	APEX staff help schools evaluate and redesign their discipline systems using a Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) model. Staff members work with 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 schoolwide interventions that will benefit every student in the school. In selected schools, the leadership efforts include the development of student-led data collection and student leadership development so that a diverse representation of "opinion leaders" can be part of the school's Universal	A team of specialists and administrators focuses on students who exhibit challenging behaviors and who are at risk for school failure owing to academic, social, or behavioral issues. The goal of this team is to design interventions for the student or group of students on the basis of 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 includes working with middle school staffs to identify and help specific at-risk eighth grade students' transition to the ninth grade in a positive way.	RENEW (Rehabilitation, Empowerment, Natural supports, Education and Work) facilitators employed by the APEX project work with staff members at each high school and specialists from community-based organizations to identify individual students who are struggling to complete their program or who have already dropped out. Individualized teams are formed for each student and are trained to develop individualized, student-directed school-to-career plans using the RENEW evidence-based practice.

Model	Level 1: All Students	Level 2: Small Student Groups	Level 3: Individual Students
	PBS team.		
Communities in Schools	Primary prevention comprises widely accessible services that are short-term, last for a few hours or days, and are open to all students. These types of services include general assemblies, health screenings, and career fairs that target risk factors for all youth at a site.	Selected prevention/intervention and indicated intervention programs are targeted to the specific needs of students and/or families and are sustained over a period of time. Selected prevention/intervention programs target certain groups of students considered to be at greater risk of dropping out or developing antisocial behavior. For example, a tutoring program targeted to all students at risk of failing courses but not yet failing is considered a selected prevention/intervention program. Indicated intervention programs target youth already exhibiting early signs of leaving school or antisocial behavior. Therefore, a tutoring program designed for students who are already failing or who were retained because of course failure is considered an indicated intervention.	
Minnesota's Three-Tiered Model	Universal Level , or primary prevention, includes all youth, at a low cost per individual. Examples are student advisory programs, efforts to engage students in extracurricular activities, school-to-work programs, and systematic positive discipline programs.	Selected Level , or prevention/intervention, comprises about 15% of youth, including those identified as being at risk of dropping out, at a moderate cost per individual. These programs work to build specific skills (e.g., problem solving, anger control, interpersonal communication), a school-within-a-school model, or mentoring programs.	Targeted Level , or indicated intervention, includes 5% of youth exhibiting clear signs of early school leaving, at a higher cost per individual. Programs include specific individualized behavior plans, intensive wrap-around services, alternative programs that provide parenting education classes, and on-site daycare for pregnant and parenting youth who have not completed school. The state advocates the use of Check and Connect.

Considerations for Adaptation or Adoption

When adopting or adapting a tiered model, a state or district might want to consider the following:

- ◆ The purpose of a tiered dropout prevention program should be explicit, with buy-in at multiple levels, from state and local education agencies to families and students.

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- ◆ The tiers within the model need to be clearly defined and easily understood by all stakeholders, including administrators, educators, families, school support staff, and students.
- ◆ A protocol needs to be established that enables students to move through the tiers seamlessly and efficiently as needs are identified or change, based on data garnered through initial screening or continual progress monitoring.
- ◆ Data need to be easily accessible, staff need to understand how to analyze the data, and a clearly established procedure for the school to react to student needs should be in place.
- ◆ Professional development is also a key factor to support both the successful implementation of interventions and the analysis of data.
- ◆ There are many causes for students to drop out of high school; therefore, there is no one solution that can be used to prevent it. Instead, a multifaceted approach needs to be offered.
- ◆ Effective strategies need to be identified and in place so that the school can efficiently react to individual student needs. Many sources of information are available, such as the following:
 - Federal technical assistance and research centers (e.g., National High School Center: <http://www.betterhighschools.com/topics/DropoutPrevention.asp>, What Works Clearinghouse: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/topic.aspx?tid=06>, National Dropout Prevention Centers: <http://www.dropoutprevention.org/>)
 - Other states' models (e.g., Minnesota's Ten Strategies to Prevent Dropout: <http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/Dropout/documents/Announcement/010795.pdf>, Iowa's Keys to Success for Dropout Prevention: <http://www.iowa.gov/educate/content/view/418/1387/>)
 - Key reports and research (see the following annotated bibliography of resources)

Annotated Bibliography of Resources (these include National High School Center and other resources)

Hammond, C., Linton, D., Smink, J., & Drew, S. (2007). *Dropout risk factors and exemplary programs*. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center, Communities In Schools, Inc. Retrieved June 2007 from the National Dropout Prevention Center Web site: http://www.dropoutprevention.org/resource/major_reports/communities_in_schools/Dropout%20Risk%20Factors%20and%20Exemplary%20Programs%20FINAL%205-16-07.pdf.

This study, conducted by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network and sponsored by Communities In Schools, Inc., finds that there are multiple risk factors that increase the likelihood that students will drop out. The evidence clearly shows that dropout is always the result of a long process of disengagement that sometimes begins before the child enrolls in kindergarten. The report also provides information on 50 programs that were found to be effective in addressing these risk factors. (Adapted from author description)

Herlihy, C., & Quint, J. (2007). *Emerging evidence on improving high school student achievement and graduation rates: The effects of four popular improvement programs*. Washington, DC: National High School Center. Retrieved June 2007 from the National High School Center Web site: http://www.betterhighschools.com/docs/NHSC_EmergingEvidence_010907.pdf.

The National High School Center released methods for improving low-performing high schools based on some of the most rigorous research currently available in the school reform arena. This research brief identifies lessons learned as well as key practices used to strengthen high schools and is based on evaluations of four widely used high school improvement programs: career academies, First Things First, Project GRAD, and Talent Development. (National High School Center description)

Jerald, C. D. (2006). *Identifying potential dropouts: Key lessons for building an early warning system*. Washington, DC: Achieve, Inc. and the American Diploma Project Network.

This white paper was prepared for Staying the Course: High Standards and Improved Graduation Rates, a joint project of Achieve, Inc., and Jobs for the Future. Its goal is to provide policymakers with an overview of research about the dropout problem and the best strategies for building an early warning data system that can signal which students and schools are most in need of interventions. Specifically, this report summarizes the research on the factors that put students at greater risk of dropping out and the relative success of methods of predicting which students will drop out and proposes a two-phase process for building an effective and efficient early warning data system. If policymakers heed the most current research, avoid the mistakes of the past, and invest sufficient up-front research and development dollars, they can build data systems to identify those students on the path to dropping out early enough to make a difference. (Adapted from author description)

Kemple, J., Herlihy, C., & Smith, T. (2005). *Making progress toward graduation: Evidence from the Talent Development high school model*. New York: MDRC. Retrieved June 2007 from the MDRC Web site: <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/408/overview.html>.

This report is an evaluation of the Talent Development High School model, a comprehensive school reform initiative developed to address the challenges of high schools, including the high dropout rate. (Author description)

Kennelly, L., & Monrad, M. (2007). *Approaches to dropout prevention: Heeding early warning signs with appropriate interventions*. Washington, DC: National High School Center. Retrieved June 2007 from the National High School Center Web site: http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_ApproachesToDropoutPrevention.pdf.

This report outlines steps that schools can take to identify at-risk students and provide the necessary support systems and relevant interventions to assist students in obtaining a high school diploma. Further, the report discusses the use of early warning data systems to target interventions for groups and individual students, offers a variety of best-practice approaches undertaken by higher performing high schools, and presents effective programs that are currently being implemented to stem the dropout problem. (Author description)

National High School Center. (2007). *New Hampshire's multi-tiered approach to dropout prevention*. Washington, DC: National High School Center. Retrieved June 2007 from the National High School Center Web site: http://www.nationalhighschoolcenter.org/docs/Snapshot_DropoutPreventionNewHampshire_031307_2.pdf.

Many states and districts across the country struggle with designing and implementing coherent dropout prevention initiatives that promote academic advancement, especially for special needs students, who drop out at much higher rates than the general student population. New Hampshire has been recognized for its innovative use of data collection and analysis as the key to unlocking the dropout problem. (National High School Center description)

National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. (2007). *Effective strategies for dropout prevention*. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. Retrieved June 2007 from the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network Web site: <http://www.dropoutprevention.org/effstrat/default.htm>.

This article presents the effective strategies identified by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network as having the most positive impact on the dropout rate. These strategies have been implemented successfully at all education levels and environments throughout the nation. (Author description)

Quint, J. (2006). *Meeting five critical challenges of high school reform: Lessons from research on three reform models*. New York: MDRC. Retrieved June 2007 from the MDRC Web site: <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/428/full.pdf>.

This research synthesis offers practical lessons for creating personalized learning environments, helping struggling freshmen, improving instruction, preparing students for the world beyond high school, and stimulating change in overstressed high schools. (Author description)

Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). (n.d.). *High schools that work: Key practices*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board. Retrieved June 2007 from the SREB Web site: <http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/background/keypractices.asp>.

Member schools implement 10 key practices for changing what is expected of students, what they are taught, and how they are taught. (Author description)

NOTE: Since the original technical assistance response was developed, other more recent resources may be available on the National High School Center's Web site: www.betterhighschools.org.