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National High School Center's Enhanced Early Warning System Tool Identifies Potential High School Dropouts and Monitors Efforts to Keep Students On Track to Graduate

Washington, D.C. — The National High School Center at the American Institutes for Research (AIR) announced today an enhanced version of its Early Warning System (EWS) Tool that identifies high school students at risk for dropping out of high school. The EWS Tool v2.0 now allows users to import student demographic and performance data from existing data systems; house an inventory of dropout prevention interventions and assign students to them; monitor student response and progress in the interventions over the course of the school year; and create pre-set school-level summary reports, detailed student-level reports, and individual student reports.

Across the United States, almost 7,000 high school students drop out of school each day. Early warning systems can help educators predict which students may be in danger of dropping out of high school by using indicators, such as attendance and course performance, to identify when students have fallen behind. With states and districts under mounting pressure to raise graduation rates, there is increasing urgency to obtain more accurate and timely data to systematically identify which students may be most likely to drop out of high school so that dropout prevention supports can be offered to get them back on track to graduate.

The EWS Tool v2.0, a free Microsoft Excel-based program, is a redesigned and enhanced adaptation of the National High School Center's original Early Warning System Tool v1.0, released in 2008, that is currently being used by the 16 Regional Comprehensive Centers that serve all 50 states. The EWS Tool v2.0 relies on readily available student-level data (attendance, course failures, grade point average [GPA], and credit accumulation) that are entered or imported by schools, districts, or states at regular intervals—as early as the first 20 or 30 days of school and after every grading period thereafter. The tool automatically calculates research-based indicators to identify, or flag, students who are at risk for dropping out of high school.

The enhanced tool also allows users to document the assignment of students to available interventions, and allows users to monitor the progress of students in assigned interventions over the course of the school year. Additionally, the EWS Tool v2.0 offers a host of student- and school-level reporting features, and can generate custom reports.

Designed to facilitate data-driven decision-making, the new features of the EWS Tool v2.0 allow users to:

- Customize the tool settings to reflect the local context (e.g., number of grading periods, GPA scale, number of credits required for promotion to the next grade);
- Integrate locally validated pre-high school (middle school) indicators, such as attendance or GPA, to identify students who may need support as they transition into high school;
- Import student-level data from existing data systems;
- Produce reports, including student- and school-level data summaries (both pre-programmed and custom);
- Assign and monitor student interventions over time; and
- Modify the benchmarks/thresholds for indicators based on analysis of longitudinal data.

“Early warning systems can serve as valuable tools for schools, districts, and states across the country that are developing or expanding data systems and working to ensure timely supports for at-risk students and



decrease their dropout rates,” commented Joseph R. Harris, Ph.D., Managing Research Analyst at AIR and Director of the National High School Center. “As schools respond to U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan’s call for increased use of data in school improvement strategies, and as more high schools focus on utilizing their School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds to implement school improvement strategies, early warning systems will increasingly be considered a critical component of successful high school improvement efforts.”

The EWS Tool v2.0 is accompanied by two supporting documents: the *Early Warning System Implementation Guide*, and the *National High School Center Early Warning System Tool v2.0 Technical Manual*. The Implementation Guide serves as a supporting document for schools and districts that are implementing the EWS Tool v2.0, but may also be used with an alternative research-based early warning system. This guide outlines a seven-step implementation process that supports school and district efforts to systematically identify students who exhibit signs that they are at risk for dropping out of high school; match these students to interventions; and monitor students’ progress in those interventions.

For each step in the implementation process, the *Implementation Guide* provides short-term strategy guiding questions to be used to examine student needs and match students to interventions within a given school year, and longer-term strategy guiding questions that focus on systemic strategies to improve outcomes over the course of multiple school years. At the core of this data-driven decision-making process is the use of key indicators that identify which students are showing signs of risk for dropping out of high school, and other relevant information, to inform decisions about the provision of dropout prevention resources.

The *National High School Center Early Warning System Tool v2.0 Technical Manual* serves as a “how-to” guide for using the EWS Tool v2.0. The manual includes instructions on the different functions and features of the tool, how to import and use data within the tool, and how to generate a variety of reports.

The enhanced EWS Tool v2.0 and supporting documents are available free-of-charge on the National High School Center’s [Web site](#).

About the National High School Center

The National High School Center (www.betterhighschools.org), established in 2005, serves as a central source of expertise on high school-related issues for the Regional Comprehensive Centers, a national network developed by the U.S. Department of Education, and provides the latest research, user-friendly tools and products, and high-quality technical assistance on high school improvement issues. The National High School Center is housed at the American Institutes for Research (AIR), located in Washington, DC. Partners include Learning Point Associates, MDRC, the National Center for Educational Achievement (NCEA), and WestEd.

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