

# Promising Programs and Practices for Dropout Prevention

Report to the Legislature



***Dr. Terry Bergeson***  
State Superintendent of  
Public Instruction

December 2005

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Old Capitol Building  
P.O. Box 47200  
Olympia, WA 98504-7200

For more information about the contents  
of this document, please contact:  
Sue Shannon, Ed.D.  
E-mail: [sshannon@ospi.wednet.edu](mailto:sshannon@ospi.wednet.edu)  
Phone: 360.725.6317

To order more copies of this document,  
please call 1-888-59-LEARN (1-888-595-3276)  
or visit our Web site at <http://www.k12.wa.us/publications>

Please refer to the document number below for quicker service:  
05-0049

This document is available online at:  
<http://www.k12.wa.us/research/default.aspx>

This material is available in alternative format upon request.  
Contact the Resource Center at (888) 595-3276, TTY (360) 664-3631.

Copyright © 2005 by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Olympia, Washington.  
The contents of this document may be reproduced and distributed for educational purposes  
without permission.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction complies with all federal and state rules and  
regulations and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age,  
or marital status.

# Promising Programs and Practices for Dropout Prevention

## Report to the Legislature

Prepared by

G. Sue Shannon, Senior Researcher  
Pete Bylsma, Director, Research/Evaluation/Accountability

Assessment and Research  
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

---

Dr. Terry Bergeson  
Superintendent of Public Instruction

Dr. Mary Alice Heuschel  
Deputy Superintendent, Learning and Teaching

---

December 2005



# CONTENTS

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
Washington Graduation and Dropout Rates	
Why Students Drop Out of School	
Research on Promising Practices and Programs Is Still Emerging	
Contents of the Report	
<b>Chapter 2 Comprehensive Improvement as a Dropout Prevention Strategy</b>	<b>12</b>
Comprehensive School Improvement	
Increasing Student Sense of Belonging and Membership	
Increasing Student Engagement through	
Effective Instruction and Meaningful Curriculum	
<b>Chapter 3 Promising Targeted Prevention and Recovery Programs</b>	<b>33</b>
Prevention through Early Intervention	
Prevention through Supplemental Programs	
Prevention through Case Management Approaches	
Prevention through School and Community Collaborations	
Prevention through Alternative Programs and Schools	
Recovery through Continuation Schools or Programs	
Guidelines for Developing Targeted Programs	
<b>Chapter 4 Implications</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Appendix A Profiles of Selected Dropout Prevention and Recovery Activities</b>	<b>65</b>
1. School-wide comprehensive improvement using Coalition of Essential Schools: Nathan Hale High School (Seattle)	
2. Advisory and school improvement: Granger High School	
3. School-wide comprehensive guidance: Franklin Pierce School District (Tacoma)	
4. Ninth-grade transition using peer mentoring and tutoring: Burlington-Edison High School	
5. Credit recapture: Auburn Riverside High School	
6. Dropout retrieval and intervention support: New Market Vocational Skills Center (Tumwater)	
7. Alternative high school: AIM High School, Snohomish School District	
8. Dropout prevention practices: Edmonds School District	
<b>Appendix B Dropout Prevention and Intervention Initiative</b>	<b>83</b>

## **Abbreviations**

ALAS	Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success
BEA	Basic Education Allocation
CTE	Career and Technical Education
FTF	First Things First
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GED	General Education Development credential
GRADS	Graduation, Reality and Dual Skills
HOSTS	Helping One Student to Succeed
HSTW	High Schools That Work
MDRC	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation
MESA	Mathematics, Engineering and Science Achievement
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act of 2001
OSPI	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Project AVID	Advancement Via Individual Determination
Project GRAD	Graduation Really Achieves Dreams
SAVE	Students Against Violence Everywhere
TDHS	Talent Development High School
VYP	Valued Youth Program
WASL	Washington Assessment of Student Learning
WDC	Workforce Development Council
WIA	Workforce Investment Act

## **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to acknowledge the assistance provided by the following people in reviewing a draft of this report: Scott Poirier, Rod Duckworth, and Nate Olson at OSPI, Wes Pruitt at the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, and Gene Sementi at West Valley School District in Spokane. We also thank Lisa Hechtman, Richard Esparza, John Aultman, Mike Curl, Geri Rohlff, Dave Halford, Tim Stensager, June Shirey, Debora Boeck, and Jan Beglau for providing information about the activities in their schools (described in Appendix A).

When preparing this document, the authors relied heavily on their report *Helping Students Finish School: Why Students Drop Out and How to Help Them Graduate*, which was published in 2003. Much of this document is taken directly from that report with appropriate updates.

## **Suggested Citation**

Shannon, G.S. and Bylsma, P. (2005). *Promising Programs and Practices for Dropout Prevention: Report to the Legislature*. Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Olympia, WA.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*Students drop out of school for many reasons, some external to school and some education-related. As a result, it is difficult to predict which students will drop out. Since there have not been rigorous evaluations of dropout prevention and recovery programs, there is no hard evidence yet that points to "best" programs and practices that will reduce the dropout rate. The implementation of the same strategy may vary widely from place to place, so results from the same program may differ. Nevertheless, the results of existing programs and practices provide useful insights when developing intervention strategies. Programs and practices fall into two broad categories: comprehensive school-wide strategies (e.g., educational reform models and strategies to increase a student's sense of belonging and engagement), and those that focus on meeting the needs of individual students. A variety of promising programs and practices exist within each category. Successful implementation of these strategies will require the political will of policymakers, educators, families, and communities and a sustained commitment and efforts over time, increased and redirected resources, and focused attention on the personal and academic needs of students.*

The consequences of not graduating from high school are increasingly serious for both individuals and society as a whole. As a result, policymakers and the federal requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have placed a new focus on increasing graduation rates and reducing dropout rates. While the dropout problem has generated research and new programs, the dropout rate has remained relatively unchanged (about 30 percent) for several decades. Students drop out of school for many reasons, and it is often difficult to know which students will leave school without receiving a diploma.

In 2005 the Washington State Legislature passed Substitute House Bill 1708 requiring the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to report on promising school-wide and targeted practices and programs that can help reduce dropout rates. This report provides information to meet this requirement. Specifically, it contains information on (1) comprehensive strategies that help prevent students from dropping out, (2) promising dropout prevention and recovery programs, and (3) the implications for educators and policymakers. In addition, an appendix highlights a variety of Washington school and district dropout prevention and recovery programs and practices that reflect the strategies that are discussed in the report. Information about career and technical education is included in each section of the report.

### **WASHINGTON GRADUATION AND DROPOUT RATES**

A student who leaves school prior to high school graduation and does not re-enroll is considered a dropout. The new NCLB definition of a graduate also considers those who receive a General Education Development (GED) certificate to be dropouts. In addition, if a student moves out of the district and no transcript is requested, the student has an

“unknown” status and is considered a dropout. Some mistakenly consider students who do not graduate within the traditional four-year period as dropouts, even though they are still enrolled in school. These students are still continuing their education and are not considered dropouts.

According to the most recent OSPI report on graduation and dropout rates in Washington using data from school year 2003–04, about six percent of all high school students (those in grades 9-12) dropped out of school. However, some groups of students have higher dropout rates. For example, males drop out at a higher rate than females, and 12 percent of the American Indian students in high school dropped out during the year. Of the students who began grade 9 in the fall of 2000 and were expected to graduate in 2004, about 21 percent dropped out and about 70 percent graduated “on-time.” (The remaining portion of the cohort was still enrolled in school, and about half of these students are expected to graduate in the future.) Only about half the American Indian, Black, and Hispanic students graduated by the end of the four-year period.

## **WHY STUDENTS DROP OUT OF SCHOOL**

Researchers have attempted to identify who drops out of school in order to help educators and policymakers develop programs, policies, and interventions that will reduce the dropout rate. In general, students drop out because of factors external to the educational setting as well as education-related factors. Although listed separately below, these factors are closely related and interact with one another.

### **External Factors**

A number of factors largely beyond the control of educators can influence students to drop out of school. Some research has focused on the students themselves or their family circumstances as the root of the problem. These studies have identified dropouts as those who are likely to be students

- from low socioeconomic backgrounds
- of color, particularly Hispanic, Native American and African American
- with poor academic achievement
- with poor school attendance
- who have repeated one or more grades
- who speak a primary language other than English
- who attend school in large cities
- who become pregnant.

The type of family mobility, support, and expectations can also have an influence on the likelihood of a student dropping out. In addition, economic and socio-cultural factors can contribute to the dropout rate. These factors include the influence of gang and drug cultures, the feeling of independence generated by having a job, and the lack of community resources to support at-risk students.



### **Education-Related Factors**

Educational institutions also contribute significantly to the dropout problem. Discipline and grading policies, school organization and size, program assignments, course content, the type of instruction, school climate, and adult-student relationships can all influence students to drop out. “Lack of engagement” and “membership in school” are terms that capture some of the factors. The National Dropout Prevention Center lists school-related factors as

- conflict between home and school culture
- ineffective discipline system
- lack of adequate counseling
- negative school climate
- lack of relevant curriculum
- passive instructional strategies
- inappropriate use of technology
- disregard of student learning styles
- retentions/suspensions
- low expectations
- lack of language instruction.

Educators should not try to predict who will drop out based on risk factors. Many who drop out do not fit the profile, and many who fit the profile finish school on time. Roderick (1993) used data from a national survey and found that the majority of dropouts have not become so disengaged from school by grade 10 that their withdrawal is inevitable.

### **RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DROPOUT PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES IS STILL EMERGING**

For decades, researchers have studied and evaluated programs and practices designed to reduce dropout rates and to help students who are struggling in school. Although many promising activities exist, there are no “best” programs and practices that apply in every situation. One researcher noted that “we do not yet have a menu of program options for helping students at risk of dropping out. The evaluation findings are useful as guides ... but they fall short of providing a scientific basis for implementing programs in new schools or districts based on the models” (Dynarski, in Orfield, 2004). The federal What Works Clearinghouse, which applies rigorous research standards in identifying effective programs and practices, listed dropout prevention as a high priority when the Clearinghouse was established in 2002. Yet the Clearinghouse has not completed reviews of research on dropout.

### **WHAT CAN BE DONE TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF DROPOUTS**

Dropout prevention and dropout recovery (also called re-entry and retrieval) programs have been developed and implemented with varying degrees of success. In this report, strategies for dropout prevention and recovery are organized into two broad categories. The first set of strategies are comprehensive in nature and are organized around three themes:

(1) comprehensive school improvement, (2) increasing students' sense of belonging in schools, frequently called "school membership," and (3) increasing student engagement through meaningful curriculum and effective instruction. The second category of strategies are the promising targeted programs for prevention and recovery of potential dropouts. Implementation of any strategy requires considerable professional development. The strategies generally require different ways of thinking about students who are at risk of dropping out, such as seeing their assets rather than deficits, and the application of a wider and deeper repertoire of instructional methods and organizational solutions.

### Comprehensive Strategies

To reduce the number of dropouts and increase graduation rates, schools need to make systemic changes. "Restructuring" and "comprehensive school improvement" are terms often used to denote the extent of change needed to create schools that are responsive to all students, including those at risk of dropping out. "School improvement" is a strategic process of reforming schools and increasing student learning. The Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools capture elements for this level of organizational change. The comprehensive strategies identified in OSPI's report *Addressing the Achievement Gap: A Challenge for Washington Educators* also apply to addressing the dropout problem. Implementing the components in these two frameworks will help create strong, supportive communities of learning for students and educators. Student engagement and school membership are concepts embedded in the strategies in these documents.

Specific school improvement models have been implemented during the past two decades. Evaluations indicate these models show promise for improving the school experiences of students. Examples highlighted in the report include:

- Coalition of Essential Schools
- First Things First
- Talent Development High Schools
- High Schools That Work
- Career Academies
- Early College High Schools.<sup>1</sup>

Additional school improvement practices include various school and classroom approaches to increase students' sense of belonging in school, such as personalizing schools and improving relationships between students and teachers, improving school climate, building resilience, and revising school discipline and attendance policies. Increasing student engagement is another strategy for improving students' performance and their connections with school. Examples of these practices include using authentic pedagogy and adaptive pedagogy (see p. 28) to make curricula more challenging and to provide sufficient support for successful student learning.

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a new initiative, and a five-year evaluation is due in 2007. It is listed because a great deal of foundation funding has been targeted to increase the number of these types of schools.

### Targeted Programs and Practices

Many existing programs focus on dropout prevention and recovery for individual students. These include early intervention, supplemental in-school and out-of-school enhancement programs and services, alternative programs, alternative schools, and continuation schools. Although little experimental or quasi-experimental research has been conducted to determine what programs work best and for whom, case studies and anecdotal evidence point to the success of many of these programs. Examples of targeted programs and practices that have been noted in the research and professional literature include:

- Early intervention, such as High/Scope Perry Pre-School, Helping One Student to Succeed (HOSTS);
- Supplemental programs, such as Graduation, Reality and Dual Skills (GRADS); Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (ALAS), Project AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination);
- Student assistance, such as Second Step and Students Against Violence Everywhere;
- Service learning;
- Mentoring;
- Case management approaches, such as Check and Connect; Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams), Workforce Investment Act Partnership Projects;
- School and community collaboration, such as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers, Communities in School; and
- Alternative programs and alternative schools.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The legislature requested recommendations regarding the most promising practices. The available research studies do not give sufficient and clear evidence to compare among promising practices, so we cannot quantify the most promising among the programs and practices that are included in this report. Many variables influence decisions regarding adoptions of programs, including factors related to community or district values, educational philosophy, and availability of resources. In addition, the quality of implementation may differ from place to place so that outcomes for the same strategies may vary widely. In other words, what works best in one location may not be the best option in another location.

Rather than ranking programs and practices, we believe the characteristics of each should be reviewed when making decisions about adopting, creating, or implementing dropout prevention or recovery strategies. Effective dropout programs and practices:

- Create school environments that are inviting, warm, and supportive;
- Assist students in obtaining social, health, and other personal resources that help students handle obstacles to their learning and help meet their emergent basic needs;
- Personalize programs with academic challenge and learning support as needed;
- Provide opportunities for students to apply their learning in relevant, real world situations and help them see the connections to their own futures; and

- Enhance personal relationships with caring adults through organizational structures that provide time and opportunity.

We believe other recommendations are in order for educators and policymakers. Education leaders need to restructure schools and provide programs for students who leave the traditional high school. Examining the more bureaucratic rules and regulations that set up some students for failure would be a good beginning point. Policies and practices in several areas need to be examined to determine their effectiveness and whether they have unintended consequences. These areas include discipline and attendance policies, implementation of high standards and grading, retention in grade, special education and remediation, transitions between school levels, course content and instruction, school climate and relationships, and evaluation of alternative programs and practices. After examining these policies and practices, steps need to be taken to improve or change ineffective policies, practices, and programs or create new ones.

OSPI has implemented some of the suggestions described in this report, but state efforts need to be expanded to more explicitly encompass dropout prevention and recovery programs. OSPI can provide leadership in developing appropriate curricula and teaching strategies for dropout prevention and recovery programs. It can also support evaluations of programs and assist in increasing the effectiveness of alternative programs.

The Legislature, State Board of Education, and other policymakers need to make dropout prevention and recovery a higher priority. Over the years, the resolve to “do something” to reduce dropouts has waxed and waned. Reducing and preventing dropouts requires creative and thoughtful action as well as resources to create programs, improve practices, and sustain the efforts over time. Although funds for “start up” programs do increase services to students, too often the efforts are short lived: when the funding goes away, so do the programs.

Undoubtedly, reducing dropout rates will require additional resources to fund “wrap around” services for students, provide professional development to increase the knowledge and skills of staff, and implement strategies to improve school climate. The Legislature currently provides “Barrier Reduction Funds” that can be used, under certain circumstances, to help students meet obstacles to their schooling. An increase in the amount of funding and extending the funding beyond skills centers to comprehensive high schools may be a wise investment in helping students successfully complete their schooling. Increasing flexibility in the administration of some programs for high school may also be in order. Finally, providing funds to support more rigorous evaluations of existing programs would help identify the most promising programs and practices for preventing dropout.

All students, not only those at-risk, will benefit from warm and caring learning environments, teachers who believe in them and their ability to learn well, teachers who do not give up on them, and a rich and challenging curriculum that is relevant to students’ lives. Schools must be places where student engagement is universal and where student membership is high. This report includes brief descriptions of specific promising programs that have been implemented in schools and districts in the state. Undoubtedly, there are others that could have been included that show equal promise.

## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

The consequences of not graduating from high school are increasingly serious for both individuals and society as a whole. Students who drop out are less likely to be employed and will earn less over their working lives.<sup>2</sup> The need for a higher skilled labor force will make it even harder for dropouts to find good jobs. Dropouts tend to experience higher rates of early pregnancy and substance abuse, and they often require more social services of various types. Young people who are imprisoned are also likely to be school dropouts.<sup>3</sup>

Policymakers and the federal requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have placed a new focus on increasing graduation rates and reducing dropout rates. Receiving a high school diploma is a milestone that society now expects of its citizens. But even though the dropout problem has been studied for years and has generated research and new programs, the dropout rate has changed little in the past 30 years.

In 2005 the Washington State Legislature passed Substitute House Bill 1708 requiring the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to report on promising school-wide and targeted practices and programs that can help reduce dropout rates. This report provides information to meet this requirement. Specifically, it contains information on (1) comprehensive strategies that help prevent students from dropping out, (2) promising dropout prevention and recovery programs, and (3) the implications for educators and policymakers. Information about career and technical education is included in each section of the report. In addition, the two appendixes highlight examples of various school and district dropout prevention and recovery programs and practices that exist in the state.

## **WASHINGTON GRADUATION AND DROPOUT RATES**

A student who leaves school prior to high school graduation and does not re-enroll is considered a dropout. The new NCLB definition of a graduate also considers those who receive a General Education Development (GED) certificate to be dropouts. In addition, if a student moves out of the district and no transcript is requested, the student has an “unknown” status and is considered a dropout. Some mistakenly consider students who do not graduate within the traditional four-year period as dropouts, even though they are still enrolled in school. These students are still continuing their education and are not considered dropouts.

---

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the relationship between education level and income, see *Education Pays, 2004: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society*, Baum, S. and Payea, K., College Board (2004). The report can be accessed at

[http://www.collegeboard.com/prod\\_downloads/press/cost04/EducationPays2004.pdf](http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/press/cost04/EducationPays2004.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> For more information about the nature of the dropout problem, why students drop out, and how the problem can be addressed, see *Helping Students Finish School: Why Students Drop Out and How to Help Them Graduate*, published by OSPI in December 2003. It can be accessed at

<http://www.k12.wa.us/research/default.aspx>. We have made extensive use of information from this publication in this report.

Using Washington state data from school year 2003–04 (the most recent available), OSPI found that about six percent of all high school students (those in grades 9-12) dropped out of school in that year. However, some groups of students have higher dropout rates. For example, males drop out at a higher rate than females, and 12 percent of all American Indian students in Washington’s public high schools dropped out during the year (see Figure 1).

The compounding effect of the annual dropout rates adds up to staggering levels over time. Of the students who began grade 9 in the fall of 2000 and were expected to graduate in 2004, about 21 percent dropped out and about 70 percent graduated “on-time.” (The remaining portion of the cohort was still enrolled in school, and about half of these students are expected to graduate in the future.) Only about half the American Indian, Black, and Hispanic students graduated by the end of the four-year period (see Figure 2).

### **WHY STUDENTS DROP OUT OF SCHOOL**

Students drop out of school for many reasons. Figure 3 shows the various reasons why students in Washington left school early in school year 2003–04. Of the 18,365 students considered dropouts that year, the largest percentage simply left without giving reasons for their departure. More than a quarter of the students said they left because they did not like school or were not doing well academically.

Researchers have attempted to identify who drops out of school in order to help educators and policymakers develop programs, policies, and interventions that will reduce the dropout rate. However, it is often difficult to know which students will leave school early without receiving a diploma. In general, students drop out because of factors external to the educational setting as well as education-related factors. These factors are closely related and interact with one another.

#### **External Factors**

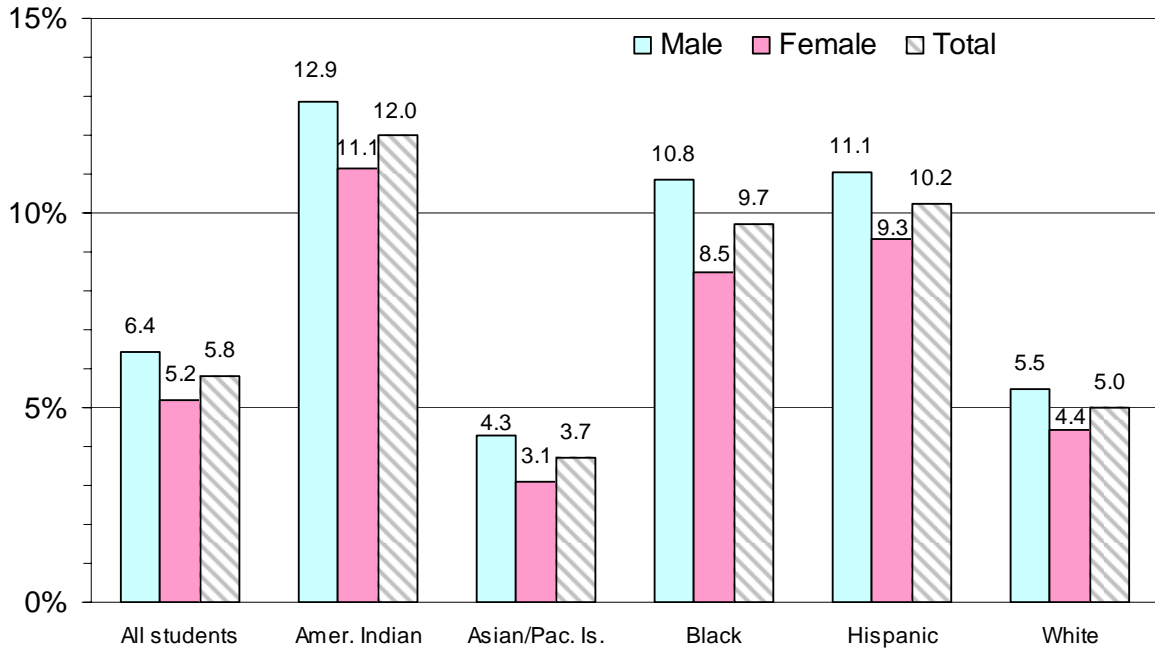
Many factors that are largely beyond the control of educators can influence students to drop out of school. Some research has focused on the students themselves or their family circumstances as the root of the problem. These studies have identified dropouts as those who are likely to be students

- from low socioeconomic backgrounds
- of color, particularly Hispanic, Native American and African American
- with poor academic achievement
- with poor school attendance
- who have repeated one or more grades
- who speak a primary language other than English
- who attend school in large cities
- who become pregnant.

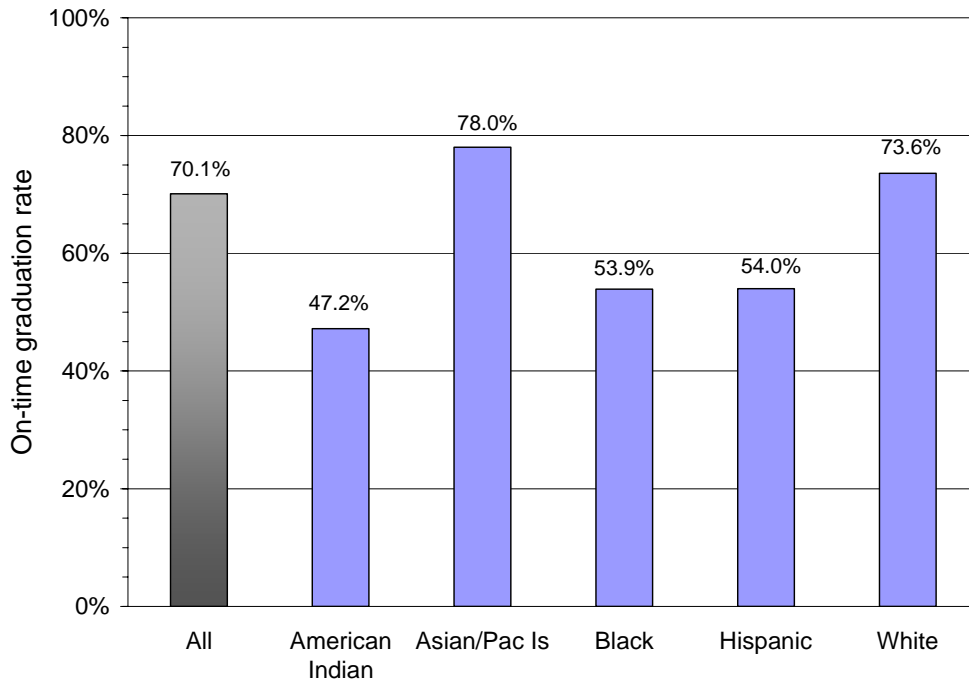
The type of family mobility, support, and expectations can also have an influence on the likelihood of a student dropping out. In addition, economic and socio-cultural factors can

contribute to the dropout rate. These factors include the influence of gang and drug cultures, the feeling of independence generated by having a job, and the lack of community resources to support at-risk students.

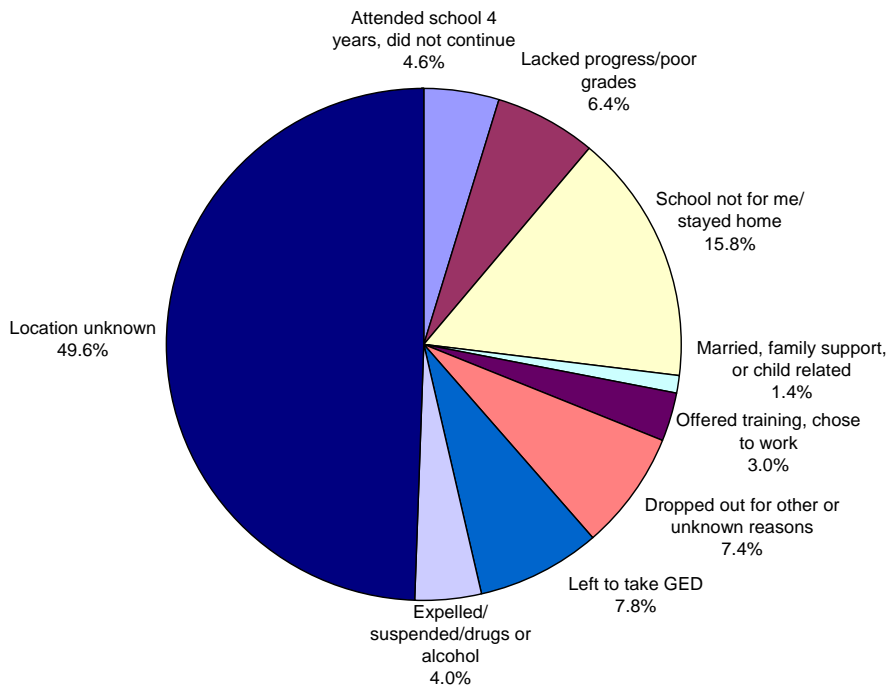
**Figure 1: Annual Dropout Rates by Gender and Race/Ethnicity in Washington State, Grades 9–12 (School Year 2003–2004)**



**Figure 2: On-Time Graduation Rates for Washington’s Class of 2004**



**Figure 3: Reasons Why Students Left School Before Graduating, Grades 9–12 (School Year 2003–2004)**



**Education-Related Factors**

Educational institutions also contribute significantly to the dropout problem. Discipline and grading policies, school organization and size, program assignments, course content, the type of instruction, school climate, and adult-student relationships can all influence students to drop out. “Lack of engagement” and “membership in school” are terms that capture some of the factors. The National Dropout Prevention Center lists school-related factors as

- conflict between home and school culture
- ineffective discipline system
- lack of adequate counseling
- negative school climate
- lack of relevant curriculum
- passive instructional strategies
- inappropriate use of technology
- disregard of student learning styles
- retentions/suspensions
- low expectations
- lack of language instruction.

Educators should not try to predict who will drop out based on risk factors. Many who drop out do not fit the profile, and many who fit the profile finish school on time. Roderick



(1993) used data from a national survey and found that the majority of dropouts have not become so disengaged from school by grade 10 that their withdrawal is inevitable. So one needs to be careful not to generalize about the characteristics of a dropout.

## **RESEARCH ON PROMISING PRACTICES AND PROGRAMS IS STILL EMERGING**

For decades, researchers have conducted research and evaluations of programs and practices designed to reduce dropout rates and to help students who are struggling in school. Although there are many promising activities, research has not fully answered the question regarding the best programs and practices. The causal link between specific programs and student achievement scores or graduation rates has not been established definitively. As one researcher noted, "... we do not yet have a menu of program options for helping students at risk of dropping out. The evaluation findings are useful as guides ... but they fall short of providing a scientific basis for implementing programs in new schools or districts based on the models" (Dynarski, in Orfield, 2004). The federal What Works Clearinghouse, which applies rigorous research standards in identifying effective programs and practices, listed dropout prevention as a high priority when the Clearinghouse was established in 2002. Yet the Clearinghouse has not completed reviews of research on dropouts, and it now projects that the first of these reviews will be available in early 2006.

## **CONTENTS OF THE REPORT**

The rest of this report discusses ways to help students who may be at risk of dropping out. Chapter 2 explores comprehensive strategies with high potential for preventing dropouts. The strategies have three themes: (1) comprehensive school improvement, (2) increasing students' sense of belonging in schools, also called "school membership," and (3) increasing student engagement through meaningful curriculum and effective instruction. Chapter 3 describes prevention and recovery programs targeted for dropouts or potential dropouts. Information about career and technical education are included in both chapters.

Chapter 4 addresses the implications for educators and policymakers, including recommendations about school and district policies and procedures, school reform efforts, and actions at the state level. Appendix A contains short summaries of various programs and practices that are being implemented around the state. Undoubtedly, there are many additional programs and practices that could have been included that show equal promise. Appendix B contains brief descriptions of twelve dropout prevention and intervention projects developed by the Workforce Investment Act Partnerships currently underway in the state.

Although the programs and practices described in this report have potential to serve students well, their inclusion is not an endorsement of "scientifically-based" programs. Conducting scientifically-based research requires random sampling and control groups to determine the effects of specific interventions, and dropout studies have rarely been experimental in nature. As a result, causal relationships have not been proven and evidence of program effectiveness is often anecdotal or correlational. Nevertheless, much can be learned from the research studies and reports that can be applied to schools and classrooms.

## CHAPTER 2

# COMPREHENSIVE IMPROVEMENT AS A DROPOUT PREVENTION STRATEGY

Dropout prevention and dropout recovery programs have been developed and implemented with varying degrees of success in the past 40 years. Research suggests that reducing dropouts and increasing graduation rates require comprehensive, concerted efforts that include systemic planning and the willingness to change existing schools and create new programs and approaches to education. No single program or practice has been discovered to significantly reduce dropout rates. “There is no magical, quick fix solution to the dropout problem. The problem is complex and requires a complex array of solutions. Dropouts have dissimilar characteristics and therefore need different kinds of programs which respond to their individual circumstances and needs” (Woods, 1995, p. 13).

Although researchers suggest certain risk factors for predicting dropout, using these factors to identify individual students as likely dropouts is problematic. Even if dropouts are accurately identified, knowing with any precision what interventions they may need is difficult. Therefore, the most promising overall strategy for reducing dropouts is restructuring schools to meet the needs of all students. Schargel and Smink advocate building “dropout prevention into all existing and newly created programs” (p. 10-11). Deschenes, Tyack, & Cuban (2001) state “Educators need to focus on better adapting the school to the child as the most feasible way to remedy the mismatch in public education and to prevent much of the labeling and stratification in the standards movement that has worked to the detriment of students in previous eras” (p. 5).

Given the scope of the problem and the multitude of root causes, a comprehensive approach is often necessary to meet the educational and personal needs of students. Addressing the dropout problem requires a critical review of current classroom instructional practices, personal interactions with students, and educational policies and programs. In many cases, school and district staff will need to make modifications in these areas. In addition, greater support will be required from the community, the state, and policymakers—the problem is simply too pervasive and the causes too widespread for the education community to address the problem by itself. This chapter discusses some specific suggestions that emerge from the body of research reviewed for this document.

This chapter explores restructuring as a strategy with high potential for preventing dropouts. The restructuring strategies are organized around three themes: (1) comprehensive school improvement, (2) increasing students’ sense of belonging in schools, frequently called “school membership,” and (3) increasing student engagement through meaningful curriculum and effective instruction.

### **COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

Numerous research and professional reports suggest comprehensive strategies to improve student learning. Alienation from school, too often reinforced by teachers and

administrators, is the most important threat to keeping at-risk students in school (Alexander et al., 2001; LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986 ). Increasing students' connectedness with schools, therefore, is fundamental to reducing the dropout rate (Woods, 1995). The implementation of the strategies explained below will help improve student learning and increase the "holding power" of schools.

### Characteristics of High Performing Schools

Strategies and processes from the school improvement literature are pertinent for reducing the number of dropouts. Schools that serve students well are those that provide for both the social and academic needs of all students. These schools are characterized by congruence between students' needs and school characteristics, marked by mutually respectful faculty and student interactions both inside and outside the classroom, and staffed by teachers who are "warm demanders" (Kleinfeld, in Gay, 2000) who persist in ensuring students learn. These high performing schools reflect personal attention and support for students in concert with high expectations for academic standards.

**High Performing Schools.** The various characteristics of high performing schools have been documented by Shannon and Bylsma (2003) for use in Washington state. Although the number and labels may vary in the research literature, there is a growing consensus that these characteristics are found in schools that are improving student learning and often doing so in the face of considerable challenges. In brief, OSPI has identified nine characteristics: (1) clear and shared focus, (2) high standards and expectations for all students, (3) effective school leadership, (4) high levels of collaboration and communication, (5) curriculum, instruction and assessments aligned with state standards, (6) frequent monitoring of learning and teaching, (7) focused professional development, (8) supportive learning environment, and (9) high level of family and community involvement.

The early research on effective schools compiled characteristics of schools that were succeeding with poor and minority children. These "correlates" of effective schools include clear school mission, high expectations for success, instructional leadership, frequent monitoring of student progress, opportunity to learn and student time on task, safe and orderly environment, and home-school relations (Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1991). These correlates continue to surface in the restructuring literature.

**Restructuring in Secondary Schools.** Improving secondary schools through restructuring has potential for significant impact on the experiences of students that inevitably influence dropping out. Three resources are particularly pertinent in helping schools increase their holding power. *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Jackson & Davis, 2000) applies to middle schools. Resources for high schools include *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* (Maeroff, 1996) and *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* (NASSP, 2004).

*Turning Points* first appeared ten years ago as a framework for improving middle level education. An updated and expanded report provides a more in-depth examination of issues regarding middle schools and builds on the recent research. The report describes studies conducted in selected middle schools in Illinois, Massachusetts, and Michigan. These

studies find that implementing the components of the “middle school concept” creates more positive environments for students and in some instances improves student achievement. However, the report emphasizes that a great deal more must be done to improve teaching and learning. Thus, the 2000 book reflects a strong emphasis on instruction, curriculum, and assessment. With the goal of ensuring student success, the authors make the following recommendations:

- “Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards for what students should know and be able to do, relevant to the concerns of adolescents and based on how students learn best.
- Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve higher standards and become lifelong learners.
- Staff middle grades schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities.
- Organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose.
- Govern democratically, through direct or representative participation by all school staff.
- Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens.
- Involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development” (p. 23-24).

*Breaking Ranks* develops six themes for restructuring high schools: personalization, coherency, time, technology, professional development, and leadership. Within these themes, the report calls for schools to change the traditional high school structure and operations. To increase personalization, the report calls for schools to make changes such as organizing into small units, using instructional strategies that accommodate individuals, and assigning a “Personal Adult Advocate” to every student. To achieve coherence, schools must align curriculum and instruction and link subjects more closely so students can understand and apply what they learn. Regarding time, the report urges abandoning the Carnegie unit of seat time and suggests more flexibility, a longer school year, and smaller teacher-student ratios. The report recommends that schools be well equipped with technology that is integral to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. For professional development, schools should promote professional growth for educators and support staff as communities of learning. In regard to leadership, the report confirms the importance of the principal but also suggests that all stakeholders have contributions to make in improving schools, including assuming leadership roles. Other recommendations are made regarding sufficiency of resources, partnerships within the broader community, and involvement of students. *Breaking Ranks II* builds on the framework of the first report and provides concrete strategies for implementing the recommendations and potential entry points for beginning the reform process. Secondary schools that implement the themes and recommendations in the reports mentioned here will undoubtedly make inroads in the numbers of students who leave school without graduating.

## Reform Models

School reform models also reflect many of the characteristics of effective schools described in the studies noted above. Although not all models address dropout issues explicitly, they do advocate for changing learning environments, curriculum and instruction, and personal relationships in order to improve student performance. A few models, cited in dropout literature, are included here as examples.

**Coalition of Essential Schools**, a comprehensive reform model developed in 1984, reports improved student performance in some schools. Using data from surveys conducted in 2001 of 41 member schools, the Coalition reports that more minority students are attending college after graduating and more students are taking rigorous coursework than reflected in the national averages. Although individual Coalition schools may be unique, they strive to implement these common principles:

- “Learning to use one's mind well
- Less is more, depth over coverage
- Goals apply to all students
- Personalization
- Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach
- Demonstration of mastery
- A tone of decency and trust
- Commitment to the entire school
- Resources dedicated to teaching and learning
- Democracy and equity.”<sup>4</sup>

Evaluations of representative Coalition schools found that many schools have made progress in eliminating tracking, opening honors classes, providing individualized instruction and changing practice that reinforce inequities. More students have access to challenging college preparatory courses, graduate and go on to college. In a study of a set of Coalition Campus Schools Project in New York, small schools that were created to replace two large comprehensive high school noted outcomes of better attendance, lower incident rates, better performance on reading and writing assessments, higher graduation rates, and higher college-going rates (Darling-Hammond, Aness, & Ort, 2002). Nathan Hale High School in Seattle, Washington, has been a member of the national network of the Coalition of Essential Schools for several years (see Appendix A).

**First Things First (FTF)** is a major comprehensive school reform model first implemented in Kansas City, Kansas. It has since been used in 12 middle schools and high schools in four other districts. The model was evaluated by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) and included in the Government Accountability Office report (2005) on dropout prevention programs because of its promise. The model includes three components: (1) small learning communities that may be organized around broad themes and include up to 350 students and their core content teachers who remain together over several years; (2) a family advocate system, in which each student is assigned a staff member who meets with the student, monitors progress, and works with the family; and (3) instructional improvement efforts to make instruction more engaging and rigorous and

---

<sup>4</sup> For more details, see [http://www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces\\_docs/about/phil/10cps/10cps.html](http://www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces_docs/about/phil/10cps/10cps.html).

aligned with state standards. The reform strategy has evolved over time. According to the MDRC evaluation, the structural changes were found to be more quickly implemented than changes to classroom practice. Positive effects were found in the Kansas City school district. The academic outcomes included “increased rates of student attendance and graduation, reduced student dropout rates, and improved student performance on the Kansas state tests of reading and mathematics.” District and school leadership and the external technical assistance were critical to successful implementation (Quint, Bloom, Black, Stephens, & Akey, 2005, p. ES-4). The evaluators note that it is “not yet clear whether the expansion sites will replicate the robust findings for Kansas City” (p. ES-6).

Other high school reform models that show promise for reducing dropout rates and increasing student success use career interests and career education as basic to content and organization of the schools. Talent Development High Schools, High Schools that Work and Career Academies are models that have existed for several years and are briefly described below.

**Talent Development High School (TDHS)**, a model created by the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk at Johns Hopkins University, is used nationwide in more than 80 schools in 20 districts (although we found none in Washington to date). The main components of the TDHS model include school restructuring, “Success Academies” for freshmen, and career academies in the upper grades. The program provides several interventions that support students as they make the transition from middle to high school. The program has been implemented most extensively in Philadelphia., and the ninth grade program is the most fully implemented and researched. A third-party evaluation was conducted by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC). The key results for first-time ninth grade students, according to the evaluation, are

- “Improved attendance for first time ninth graders
- Increased total number of credits earned by first-time ninth-grade students
- Produced substantial gains in academic course credits earned by first time ninth-grade students, especially the percentage of students earning a credit in algebra. (Double-dose courses in English and math and first-semester catch-up courses are strategies used.)
- Improved overall promotion rate to the tenth grade
- Produced slight improvement in students performance on state standards assessment in math, no systematic change in reading scores” (Kemple, Herlihy, & Smith, 2005, p. 47-69).

McPartland and Jordan (2001) describe the TDHS as a reform model that illustrates change processes. The authors summarize the essential components of high school dropout prevention programs: (1) structural, organizational, governance changes to “establish the school norms and interpersonal relations” for learning; (2) “curriculum and instructional innovations to give individual students the necessary time and help . . .”, and (3) teacher support systems (p.1).

**High Schools That Work (HSTW)** is a high school reform model developed by the Southern Regional Education Board in 1987. The goal of HSTW is to ensure that all students, including those who do not plan to complete a four-year college degree, are prepared to enter the competitive workforce. The program advocates for a combination of

both college preparation and career education studies for all students. It sets ambitious goals for all students and emphasizes improving relationships among academic and career-technical teachers and between teachers and students. HSTW does not specify a curriculum but requires all students to take challenging courses, e.g., three courses in math and three in science that are equivalent to college preparatory programs. The model requires a structured system of work-based learning and provides a system of extra help. The schools in the program check student performance periodically on NAEP-based (National Assessment of Educational Progress) assessments. Evaluation of the program has been conducted largely by the developer with a few external studies. The evaluation report from 1996–1998 indicated that increasing numbers of students are meeting the HSTW achievement goals in math, science, and reading according to results of the HSTW assessments. However, the researcher notes that the analysis cannot determine whether this increase is related to participation in HTSW or to other factors” (Frome, 2001, p. 15, also see Jurich & Estes, 2000, Bottoms, 2004). A new initiative of OSPI’s Office of Secondary Education is promoting HSTW by providing grants for 10 high schools to implement HSTW in Washington.

**Career Academies** have been a prominent reform strategy in large urban school systems for a number of years, beginning in Florida and California in the 1970s and 1980s. The strategy takes many shapes depending upon the local circumstances. Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) has conducted ongoing evaluations of career academies since 1993. Evidence from a study that followed students through three or four years in high school showed modest results when averaged across the groups of students in the academies. However, evidence differed according to subgroups when the data were disaggregated by degree of students’ risk of dropping out. Students in the high-risk subgroup had been disengaged from school, had failed courses and low attendance rates, or were retained in grade early in the high school years. Among these students, the researchers found that “career academies significantly cut dropout rates and increased attendance rates, credits earned toward graduation, and preparation for post-secondary education” (Kemple & Snipes, 2000, p. ES-11). However, the academies produced only modest improvement in student engagement and academic performance.

Lastly, the **Early College High School Initiative** is a relatively recent effort to increase the opportunities of students to obtain some college experiences before they complete high school. These programs have received extensive funding from foundations that plan to establish over 180 of them by 2008 (Hoffman & Vargas, 2005). The initiative has some similarity to Middle Colleges, a program developed in the 1970s, that has served as a targeted intervention for students who have dropped out (see discussion on page 14). Early College High Schools are too recent an innovation for impact evaluations to have been conducted. However, a five-year evaluation is due in 2007.

### Elements of Effective Implementation

Implementing comprehensive reform is difficult and many attempts fall short of the vision and goals of school improvement models due to “powerful systemic forces resistant to the changes” (Duttweiler, in Smink & Schargel, 2004, p. 62). To increase the likelihood of

successful implementation of improvement models, a number of system elements should be considered. Duttweiler suggests the following:

- “*Consensus*—Gain consensus that change is needed among those who must carry out the change within the district and the schools. Make sure there is a willingness and determination to improve throughout the district.
- *Assess needs and assets*—Use both data and professional experiences to assess and survey assets.
- *Build capacity*—Build professional capacity within the schools and across the district to plan and carry out the reform.
- *Involvement*—Have those who must implement the reforms select or create a model and develop a process for change.
- *District change*—Systemic renewal and comprehensive school reform are not add-ons; what happens at the district level must change as much as what happens at the school level.
- *Leadership*—Provide a broad base of leadership and leadership stability.
- *Resources*—Ensure that there are sufficient resources to implement and sustain the effort.
- *Monitor and assess*—Monitor both the process of implementation and the desired results; collect data and embark on the assessment at the beginning of the effort.
- *Technical assistance*—Call on expert technical assistance for planning, developing capacity, and assessing the effort.
- *Sufficient time*—Provide sufficient planning and start-up time. Do not expect to obtain significant improvement results in student achievement before three to five years into the implementation of the effort” (p. 62).

### Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gap

The strategies identified in the report *Addressing the Achievement Gap: A Challenge for Washington Educators* (Shannon & Bylsma, 2002) also apply to reducing the dropout rate. The five strategies, synthesized from the research and professional literature, are (1) changed beliefs and attitudes, (2) culturally responsive teaching, (3) more effective teaching, (4) greater opportunities to learn, and (5) increased family and community involvement. Within each broad strategy are specific practices that improve student learning, student belonging and involvement in school, and levels of support. Students who drop out of school, or who are at-risk of dropping out, benefit from teachers who believe they can succeed, care about them, hold high expectations, and persist in teaching them.<sup>5</sup>

The research and professional literature on dropouts confirms the importance of these strategies. Authors of reports on **Hispanic** students and dropouts emphasize the importance of positive beliefs and attitudes, culturally responsive teaching, and effective instruction. In their study on the Hispanic dropout problem, Lockwood and Secada (1999) state, “Hispanic students deserve to be treated as if they matter” (p. 3). The report’s overarching findings and recommendations include the following:

- “Schools and school staff must connect themselves—both institutionally and personally—to Hispanic students and their families, provide Hispanic students with

---

<sup>5</sup>The report is available on OSPI’s Web site at <http://www.k12.wa.us/Research/>.



a high-quality education based on rigorous standards, and provide backup options to push both students and staff past obstacles that come up on the way to achieving those rigorous standards.”

- “Students and their families deserve respect. In many cases, this means that school staff and other educational stakeholders must change long-held conceptions of Hispanic students and their families. These stakeholders need to see Hispanic students as central to the future well-being of the United States rather than as foreign and unwelcome. They also need to recognize that Hispanic families have social capital on which to build. Hispanic students deserve genuine opportunities to learn and to succeed in later life—rather than being dismissed as deficient because of their language and culture” (p. 3).

A study of high-performing schools serving Mexican American students reflect many of the characteristics found in other reports on effective schools. However, differences are evident in the way schools implement the elements. For example, these schools focus on cultural values, establish personal contact with families, develop student-centered classrooms, and implement an “advocacy-oriented approach to assessment that held educators accountable for their instructional strategies and for the impact they had on Mexican American learners” (Scribner & Scribner, 2001, p. 1; also, Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999). These researchers also point to a difference in perspective on parent involvement. The Mexican American parents tend to value involvement when they see their activities enhancing the school environment for their students; teachers generally see parent involvement as a means for improving student achievement.

Another report summarizes factors associated with academic achievement of Hispanic students. In addition to the development of language skills, other improvements in instructional quality and school environment are equally important. Five teaching practices that researchers suggest work well with Hispanic students include culturally-responsive teaching, cooperative learning, instructional conversations, cognitively-guided instruction, and technology-enriched instruction. Educational experiences for Hispanic students also improve in classrooms characterized by a sense of belonging and student and community empowerment (Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002).

Recommendations for decreasing dropouts among **Native American** students include many similar characteristics. Researchers assert that these students benefit from active learning, caring teachers, culturally relevant curriculum and instruction, and small learning environments (Reyhner, 1992; St. Germaine, 1995). Demmert (2001) cites research that suggests the importance of Native language and cultural programs on student academic performance. He writes, “A series of studies conducted in the past 30 years collectively provides strong evidence that Native language and cultural programs—and student identification with such programs—are associated with improved academic performance, decreased dropout rates, improved school attendance rates, decreased clinical symptoms, and improved personal behavior” (p. 9). According to some studies, learning for these students was enhanced by “informal classroom organization, flexible arrangement of furniture and emphasis on group work; shared locus of control by teachers and pupils; cooperative learning; use of dialogue; and culturally relevant materials” (p. 19). Other studies found students respond positively in “cooperative-style classrooms with peer-

directed, collaborative group work.” An emphasis on “open-ended questioning, inductive/analytical reasoning, and student discussions in large and small group settings” also were successful in engaging students. “In classrooms where dialogue is shared between students and teachers and where students’ ideas are encouraged within the context of their Native language and culture, Native students are found to respond eagerly to questioning, even in English ...” (p. 19).

The Native American reading curriculum, created in a partnership between OSPI and The Evergreen State College in Olympia, is based on Northwest tribal stories that were “gifted” to the project. The curriculum shows promise in providing culturally relevant and rich supplemental reading materials to engage Native children and others in learning to read. This curriculum is available through the Indian Education office at OSPI. There has been no longitudinal research to link such reading materials to graduation or dropout rates. However, the importance of reading to a student’s successful progress through school has been documented.

McKinley (2005) identified instructional and management strategies that successful teachers use with **African American** students that appear to close achievement gaps on standardized assessments. The strategies used in her research were drawn from literature reviews, and empirical, quasi-experimental, and survey studies in K-12 settings. Her framework is based on five areas that constitute an equity pedagogy: “(1) effective instruction that is culturally responsive, (2) positive interpersonal relationships that draw on the social constructivist aspects of teaching, (3) cultural congruence with students’ backgrounds, (4) positive attitudes and beliefs that nurture student motivation, and (5) social activism that addresses racism, disparate expectations, conditions, and opportunities to learn” (p. 3). McKinley’s framework organizes the strategies under categories of variables including instructional program, contextual features and classroom environment, and classroom assessment. The framework includes 42 specific interrelated descriptors. For example, under *Instructional Variables*, she describes multicultural approaches to instruction, cultural competence, information in the curriculum on cultural differences, and maintaining active participation. For the *Classroom Climate/Environment Variable*, she lists teacher-student interactions, including social variables such as fairness, respect, low favoritism, caring, and low friction. Under *Classroom Management*, she gives indicators for improving student discipline. These include explicit coaching on appropriate behavior and guarding against student loss of peer respect. Effective teachers in the study adapted their knowledge, philosophies, instruction, and contextual features to students’ cultures, needs, learning preferences, and prior experiences.

Gay (2002) suggests learning opportunities that work well with students of color and are consistent with culturally responsive teaching. Although she does not explicitly address dropouts in this discussion, she notes that certain instructional practices are likely to increase the relevance of school for at-risk students. Her suggestions include:

- “Getting students personally involved in their own learning
- Using varied formats, multiple perspectives, and novelty in teaching
- Responding to multiple learning styles
- Modeling in teaching and learning

- Using cooperation and collaboration among students to achieve common learning outcomes
- Learning by doing
- Incorporating different types of skill development (e.g., intellectual, social, emotional, moral) in teaching and learning experiences
- Transferring knowledge from one form or context to another
- Combining knowledge, concepts, and theory with practice . . .
- Students reflecting critically on their knowledge, beliefs, thoughts, and actions” (p. 196).

### **INCREASING STUDENT SENSE OF BELONGING AND ENGAGEMENT**

For students to learn rigorous content and to complete their schooling, they need to be engaged and feel a sense of belonging in the school community. Smith (1991) suggests that “. . . instead of thinking of potential dropouts as qualitatively different from other students, it is perhaps more accurate to think of all students on a continuum running between the poles of marginal-disengaged to member-engaged” (p. 72). Student engagement implies more than motivation. Newmann (1991) makes this distinction: “Academic motivation usually refers to a general desire or disposition to succeed in academic work and in the more specific tasks of school.” Engagement is “a construct used to describe an inner quality of concentration and effort to learn” (p. 13).

Finn (1989) uses identification and participation as components of a model for understanding dropping out. His premise is that “participation in school activities (both classroom and extracurricular activities) is essential in order for positive outcomes, including the students’ sense of belonging and valuing school related goals, to be realized” (p. 129). Identification with school “denotes perceptions of congruence of the self” with the school or social group “in the form of shared values or sense of belonging” (p. 134).

Increasing students’ sense of belonging and their involvement or engagement in their learning will require substantive changes in the way schools are generally designed, particularly at the secondary level. Two approaches to achieving these goals, though not mutually exclusive, are (1) personalizing schools and (2) increasing student engagement. Extensive research and professional literature develop these two approaches, and several studies are highlighted below.

#### **Increasing Student Belonging by Personalizing Schools**

Research on student commitment to institutions supports the importance of school membership (Tinto in Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). Students’ sense of belonging, frequently called school membership, can be defined as bonding with the school that develops “when students establish affective, cognitive, and behavioral connections to the institution.” Schools have responsibility for creating conditions so that students experience a sense of membership. Student belonging is enhanced when schools reflect purpose, equity, personal support, opportunities for success, and a school climate based on caring (Newmann, 1991, p. 20).

Personalizing school experience makes a difference for students, both socially and academically. More personal attention and adaptation of schooling practices to individual needs influence students' attitudes, commitment to school, and their willingness to take risks in their learning. Teachers who know students well, who take time to explain and reteach as needed, encourage and support students' efforts to learn—in other words, “do what it takes”—make a difference. In their study of fourteen alternative schools, Wehlage et al. (1989) report that “effective schools provide at-risk students with a community of support.” The schools that successfully reduce or prevent student dropout create a “supportive environment that helped students overcome impediments to membership and engagement” (p. 223). Because students are particularly vulnerable during transitions between schools, educators “must create friendly and supportive school environments and pay close attention to students' needs” at these times (Lan & Lanthier, 2003, p. 327).

Teachers and staff in smaller school environments have more opportunity to personalize schools than do teachers in large schools. Researchers who have looked at private independent and Catholic schools cite school size as instrumental in the relationships that develop in them (Lee & Burkam, 2000; Woods, 1995). Personalizing schools, however, requires more than simply reducing the numbers. Small numbers make the task of personalization more manageable, however, and provide opportunities to help “safeguard against alienation (Newmann, 1989, p. 161). Other changes must occur including more positive interactions between teachers and students, supportive school climate, and enhancing student capacity to succeed in school (Cotton, 1996, 2001; Raywid, 1999).

A national effort to personalize high schools through small learning communities was initiated in 2000 by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The initiative supports the startup of new small schools and conversion of existing large high schools into autonomous small schools that may share a building. In addition to size, the Foundation's program expects schools to offer challenging, inquiry-based curriculum that is motivating, rigorous, and preparatory to college. Because the initiative is relatively new, statistics on dropout rates in these schools do not exist. However, preliminary findings from a comparative survey of several grant schools indicate that small schools appear to improve the experiences of young people. Specifically, relationships between adults and students were deeper and more supportive, both academically and personally, in small schools than in pre-conversion large schools. These findings, however, cannot be seen as evidence of a causal connection between school size and student outcomes (AIR and SRI, 2003).

**Small School Environments.** Creating and constructing small school buildings are, of course, one means of providing small, personal learning environments. However, small buildings may not always be viable. Therefore, programmatic strategies have been devised to work within the context of large comprehensive secondary schools. Three strategies illustrate the possibilities for creating small learning environments.

1. Schools within a school. This strategy was found effective in countering dropout (Woods, 1995, p. 5) and is implemented in various ways. Some examples, found generally in large comprehensive schools, include separate “academies” around career oriented themes, “houses” for a targeted grade level such as 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and “alternative” classes for targeted students.

2. Teaming. Groups of students are assigned with a team of teachers for at least a portion of the school day so those teachers can know students better, which builds community within the school.
3. Student support through mentors, advocates, advisors, or tutors. Schools may organize advisories or homerooms that assign students to an advisor who may stay with them for a period of years and provide academic and social support. Tutoring individually or in small groups also provides personal support for student learning.

These strategies have had varying degrees of success, depending on the specifics of the program, the degree of commitment of the adults in the schools, and the overall levels of support provided to students.

Small class sizes also have potential for helping personalize schools for students at risk of dropping out. Although the research on class size at the secondary level is limited, researchers suggest that student social and academic behavior are influenced by size of classes. Finn, Pannozzo, and Achilles (2003), based on their review of educational research as well as work by psychologists and sociologists, suggest that students in small groups are more likely to participate in class because they are more visible and less able to “hide in the crowd” (p. 327) and more likely to feel a “sense of belonging” (p. 351). According to some studies, there is more group cohesiveness in small classes and less splintering into subgroups that may be counter-productive to academic participation. Researchers also suggest that teachers in small classes have better morale, allow students more latitude in behavior and learning styles, and know students better.

Small school environments have potential to increase the quality of relationships, but so do other school activities and programs. Examples of these are counseling and mentoring programs, cross-age tutoring, project learning or experiential learning, and co-curricular activities.

**Student and Adult Connections.** Personalizing schools requires increasing student “attachment to valued adults in school” (Fashola & Slavin, 1997, p. 3), which helps reduce student alienation, disaffection, and subsequently dropouts. Researchers have examined the importance of social capital in regard to successful school experiences and dropping out. Croninger and Lee (2001) conclude that teachers are “an important source of social capital for students” and “teacher-based forms of social capital reduce the probability of dropping out by nearly half.” They write, “Positive social relationships can create powerful incentives to attend school, even when schoolwork is difficult and classroom expectations are troublesome” (p. 551). These researchers find that students with low levels of social capital had a higher probability of dropping out of school regardless of other factors related to academic risk.

Students attach considerable importance to teachers’ attitudes and behavior toward them, particularly whether they believe their teachers care (Corbett, Wilson, & Williams, 2002; Delpit, 1995; Farrell, 1990, 1994; Ferguson, 1998; Wehlage et al., 1989). Dropouts connect their memories of a good year in school to the attributes of teachers (Farrell, 1990). Wehlage et al. state that students in the alternative schools they studied judged the schools by saying something to the effect that “this school is better because the teachers here care about me.” The authors explain, “This caring attitude is revealed in different ways, but it is

always communicated by active and demonstrated interest on the part of adults for the welfare of students” (p. 131). They also emphasize that educators in the alternative schools they studied assumed that students who had failed in traditional schools could be successful. The students had to be helped to adjust to school, but school also had to adjust to students’ needs. “Most students want to achieve and school membership is contingent upon their demonstrating academic competence to themselves and others” (p. 126). The professionals in these schools believed that the interactions between adults and students are built on mutual respect. Moreover, educators are responsible for taking the “initiative in helping students overcome impediments to social bonding and membership” (p. 135).

In another study, researchers argue for “social scaffolding” or organizational support to help students in navigating the school system to obtain the services and support they require. They maintain that this process fosters “student identities and peer cultures oriented toward academic success” (Mehan, Hubbard, & Lintz, cited in Conchas, 2001, p. 4). As students learn “the ropes,” they can more effectively negotiate the system on their own. The study, which describes the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program for African American and Latino youth, shows that school context contributes to student academic engagement and can affect students’ sense of optimism or pessimism regarding school experiences. The Schoolwide Comprehensive Guidance program, implemented in Franklin Pierce School District in Tacoma, is an example of a program that provides students with help “navigating” the school system and planning for their futures.

Practitioners offer advice for building positive relationships. In an article in Educational Leadership, for example, Mendes (2003) encourages educators to:

- “Acknowledge all responses and questions.
- Mention students’ names, skills, ideas, and knowledge in your representations—without mentioning weaknesses or confidential information.
- Use self-disclosure when appropriate. Be a real person.
- Use responses beginning with ‘I agree,’ ‘I appreciate,’ and ‘I respect.’
- Ask students about their interests. Collect an information card at the beginning of the year and have students update it regularly. Pay attention to students’ nonverbal responses and make adjustments as you capture their interest or hit neutral ground.
- Build on what you hear from students by sharing stories, interests, and worries.
- Display empathy with individuals and with classes by communicating what you think their needs or feelings might be.
- Listen actively. Match students’ expressions and conveyed moods. Paraphrase their message, when appropriate. Know your students’ world and go there first to open the relationship door” (p. 58).

**Supportive School Climate.** An optimal school environment is student focused and consequently more personal. According to a set of guidelines for middle school dropout prevention, supportive schools are characterized by:

- “High but flexible expectations for students
- Diverse opportunities for achieving success
- Recognition of students’ achievements
- Opportunities for students to define their goals clearly and realistically

- Opportunities to help students monitor their own progress in achieving their goals
- Motivational instruction and activities to heighten students' occupational aspirations
- Early identification of at-risk students
- More extensive guidance and counseling services for at-risk students
- Specific educational plans for dropout-prone at-risk students
- Programs that help students address the conditions and stresses that place them at risk
- Promotion of students' sense of belonging to the school
- Clear, fair, and consistent disciplinary rules
- A high degree of student participation in extracurricular activities
- Intimate and caring work environment for staff and students alike
- Close adult-student relationships" (cited in West 1991, p. 17).

Hixson (1993) stresses that "building on student strengths (e.g., knowledge, experiences, skills, talents, interests, etc.), rather than focusing on remediating real or presumed deficiencies is the key" to improving learning for at-risk students. This aligns with the importance of culturally-responsive instruction that honors the background and experiences students bring to their classrooms (Gay, 2000; Guldin, 2002).

**Building Resilience.** The research on resiliency provides an approach for creating a personalized and supportive school climate that can assist students in overcoming adversity and increasing their chances of staying in school. Educational resiliency is defined as "the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences" (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994, cited in Waxman, Gray, & Patron, 2003).

According to Bernard (1993), a resilient child has social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future. Garmezy (in NCREL, 1994) describes resiliency with these traits: "effectiveness in work, play, and love; healthy expectations and a positive outlook; self-esteem and internal locus of control; self-discipline; and problem-solving and critical thinking skills and humor" (p. 7). Along with family and community, schools have a role in helping students develop resiliency. According to Bernard, families, schools, and communities foster resilience through caring and support, positive expectations, and ongoing opportunities for participation. When families and communities are not working well for children, however, schools become more important. Specific strategies that schools can use to promote resiliency include:

- "Ensure each child some significant contact with a supportive adult.
- Develop peer support programs.
- Train students in self-motivation.
- Create circuit-breaker mechanisms for intervening in negative chains of events that jeopardize students.
- Develop learning approaches that build on the prior cultural knowledge children bring to school, rather than exploiting their weaknesses.
- Pursue topics of personal interest to each child.
- Bring integrated social services into the school" (NCREL, 1994, p. 7).

The findings in this body of research can help educators consider and modify elements in the school to create productive, healthy environments that foster resiliency. Waxman et al. suggest proactive approaches to help a school develop educational resilience: Professional development based on classroom observations and feedback on perceptions of resilient and non-resilient students' about the learning environment and their experiences; changing classroom instruction to be more engaging, focused on student goals, with immediate feedback; and promoting a supportive, nurturing, trusting school environment for both teachers and students.

Some schools have considered “asset building” as a means for increasing resiliency and preventing dropping out and other high-risk behaviors. From a series of survey studies conducted between 1990–1995, the Search Institute identified 40 external and internal developmental assets critical to the well-being of young people. Enhancing these assets is an approach for creating a nurturing school. *External* assets include four categories: (1) support in all areas of life, (2) empowerment through service to others and feeling valued and safe, (3) boundaries and expectations that include rules and consequences, positive role models and peer influences, and high expectations, and (4) constructive use of time through activities that foster personal growth. *Internal* assets include commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies such as interpersonal skills, decision making, conflict resolution, resistance skills and cultural competence, and positive self-identity (Davis & Race, 2003, p. 23-24). Schools can develop and implement programs and activities that foster these assets.

**Discipline and Attendance Policies.** School and school district policies can have adverse impact on students' staying in school and can have unintended consequences. Policies and enforcement strategies either can increase student connections and sense of belonging in school, or they can increase the barriers students must surmount to stay in school, particularly for those who are struggling the most. Bureaucratic regulations and overt actions taken by school officials can actually eliminate students from school enrollment. Policies related to student behavior and truancy often carry punishments such as suspensions or expulsions that may ultimately lead to students' quitting school. Suspensions for poor attendance, truancy, and tardiness exacerbate withdrawal behavior and help convince students that they do not belong in school. The more school missed, voluntarily or involuntarily, the less learning takes place, the farther behind a student becomes, and the greater the likelihood of leaving school. Romo and Falbo (1997) recommend that policies be revised so schools “make it hard for students to drop out and easy for them to return to school.” They assert that “at present, the reverse is true” (p. 184). In their study, students found it easy to skip out of class. However, the act of returning to school, which required presenting permission slips for reentry, was a humiliating experience. Students decided nonattendance was preferable to the negative reactions they encountered when they returned to school.

A case study of Adlai Stevenson High School, a large 9-12 school (enrollment of 4,573) in Lincolnshire, Illinois, describes discipline policies based on providing students with incentives, rather than punishments. The school used incentives that students valued in order to recognize students' meeting academic and behavioral standards. The school instituted a graduated set of privileges for students as they progress through high school.



The school provides a somewhat restrictive learning environment for ninth graders, who generally need more support and structure, with a short lunch and time for advisory. As students “prove” themselves through good grades and behavior, they earn more freedom and flexibility. Sophomores are given longer lunch periods; juniors also have longer lunch periods but also have one free period during the day, with the options to use the time in a number of areas on campus. Seniors have the most privileges—they may drive to school, take their open periods at the beginning or end of the school day, and leave campus whenever they are not scheduled for a class. The school treats seniors, who are just months away from entering the “real world” of work or college, as mature, responsible young adults. Of course, if students do not maintain their grades and positive behavior, they lose privileges. Students are given many opportunities to earn privileges and gain more autonomy, yet the school provides a “safety net” if students do not make “wise decisions” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004, p. 74-75).

Alternatives to out-of-school suspension have been devised by many schools. School or community service, in-school suspension, or Saturday school have been used as consequences for misbehavior or truancy. Of course, students may still view such consequences as punitive. However, they stop short of denying students access to their schooling or loss of grades and credits that put students in jeopardy for dropping out, particularly if students are provided personal support or mentoring, academic assistance, and other guidance along the way.

### **INCREASING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT THROUGH EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION AND MEANINGFUL CURRICULUM**

Reformers call for curriculum and instruction that is rigorous, relevant, and incorporates advanced thinking skills along with basic skills. Increasing student engagement for students at risk of dropping out requires the same kind of curriculum and instruction. In their study of dropout programs, Wehlage et al. (1989) conclude that students at risk of failure traditionally are not provided appropriately challenging experiences and too little is expected of them. They write, “It is not surprising that an education that may consist of little more than a series of curricular hoops leading to graduation fails to engage or inspire at-risk students. These students need educational experiences that draw them into the learning process by igniting their imagination, interest, and commitment to others. An emphasis on remediation or the mastery of isolated facts or skills seems unlikely to alter their less-than-positive orientation to learning, yet it is just this orientation that must be changed if at-risk youth are to carve out a satisfactory place for themselves in our increasingly demanding economy” (p. 216). The authors are also critical of some alternative schools on this point. Although the researchers found that these schools developed social communities to meet the personal needs of students and keep them in school, many did not provide sufficiently for the academic needs of their students.

Instruction that is personally relevant and meaningful in the world beyond the classroom is more likely to ignite the imagination and interest than the remedial coursework frequently offered to potential dropouts. Authentic pedagogy, teaching for understanding, and constructivist instruction are terms, though not exact synonyms, used to describe effective, engaging instruction that reflects the principles of learning. In addition, other approaches to

curriculum design and classroom practice suggest ways to increase relevance and rigor in classrooms. Career and technical education programs also provide relevance for many students and demonstrate connections between school and the world beyond.

**Authentic Pedagogy.** Authentic pedagogy is a framework for engaging instruction developed by Newmann and Wehlage (1995). The standards include: (1) construction of knowledge with high order thinking skills, (2) disciplined inquiry including deep knowledge of content and its complexities and substantive conversation through which students and teachers engage in extended discussions to promote understanding, and (3) value beyond school as students make connections between their learning and public problems or personal experiences. In other words, when authentic pedagogy is implemented, students are focused and connected with rigorous and meaningful content, have opportunities for interaction with other students as they gain understanding of the content, and apply what they learn in “real world” contexts for purposes other than pleasing the teacher. Newmann et al. developed the authentic pedagogy framework from research conducted over five years in 24 schools and 130 classrooms across several states and school districts with additional data from surveys and several four-year case studies in restructuring schools. In their study, students in classrooms that reflected the components or standards of authentic pedagogy achieved at higher levels than others, across socioeconomic and racial/ethnic groups.

In their work on student engagement, Newmann, Wehlage, and Lamborn (1992) drew from research in psychology, sociology, and studies of schooling to identify several important factors. They write that engagement in academic work results “largely from three broad factors: (1) students’ underlying need for competence, (2) the extent to which students experience membership in the school, and (3) the authenticity of the work they are asked to complete” (p. 17). Authentic work is characterized by tasks that are considered “meaningful, valuable, significant, and worthy of one’s effort ...” (p. 23). These tasks are also connected to the real world and should offer opportunity for “fun.” School work is more authentic when it exemplifies characteristics of adult work such as having impact on others outside the classroom, providing clear and prompt feedback, encouraging collaboration with peers and authorities, and offering flexibility in use of time. Because learning is hard work, student engagement is more likely to be sustained when there are opportunities for humor, play, and fun.

Students are more willing to make persistent efforts in their learning when they believe their schoolwork is important. The degree of importance they attribute to their schoolwork is linked to their interests, relevance to work in the real world, their friends’ and parents’ perceptions of learning as valuable, and the enthusiasm and engagement of their teachers (Murphy, Beck, Crawford, Hodges, & McGaughy, 2001).

**Adaptive Pedagogy.** Darling-Hammond (2002) emphasizes that “high standards cannot work without high supports” (p. 27). Adaptive pedagogy, a term used by psychologist Robert Glaser, refers to modes of teaching that are adjusted to individuals, including their backgrounds, talents, interests, and their past performance. Multiple instructional strategies are used to support the active learning of students and to provide them with a variety of “entry points to learning” (p. 27). Drawn from a study of innovative small schools,

representing elementary as well as high schools, Darling-Hammond provides the following examples of adaptive pedagogy:

- *Group work* – highly structured through activity guides with “substantial scaffolding” and “active teacher coaching and assistance.” Groups work on “authentic, open-ended tasks” that call for the expertise of group members.
- *Explicit Teaching of Academic Skills* – High schools generally assume students have mastered advanced skills in reading, writing, and inquiry. However, high schools need to provide the instruction to fill in the gaps for students who “do not know how to conduct research, synthesize information, or plan and structure a paper, experiment, or project.”
- *Scaffolding* – Rather than reduce the demands of curriculum, students are explicitly taught “how to approach academic tasks, how to read and write at a college level, and how to evaluate their own and others’ work.”
- *Culture of Revision and Redemption* – In adaptive pedagogy there is a learning environment that gives “students the opportunity to tackle difficult tasks without fear of failure” through practice, revision, and support. Students develop “the courage and confidence to work continuously to improve in their successive efforts” until their work meets standard.
- *Extra Support* – Schools provide extra classes, tutoring sessions, resource rooms, and volunteer tutors outside of class. Students who need extra help get that support in the class, and they receive added support outside of class.
- *Strong Relationships* – Schools have to be environments that promote strong teacher-student relationships. To help build strong relationships, schools may reduce teacher pupil loads, reduce class sizes, and reduce student course loads and/or schedule longer teaching blocks.
- *Culturally Responsive Teaching* – Schools “explicitly embrace cultures” of students, “celebrate their students as individuals and as members of specific cultures,” engage students in sharing their culture and knowledge, and use instructional materials that reflect different cultures and viewpoints (p. 27-33).

**Improving Curriculum Design.** Several educational experts suggest approaches to designing curriculum to increase student engagement and learning. To increase student involvement, Strong, Silver, Perini, and Tuculesca (2003) advocate for curriculum based on four natural human interests, that reflects the factors used by Newmann. These interests are: “the drive toward mastery, the drive to understand, the drive toward self-expression, and the need to relate” (p. 25). From their work with several schools, districts, and students, Strong et al. devised a rubric for curriculum design that raises questions related to each interest and a survey tool to help identify student interests. They encourage educators to learn how to design curriculum around student interests and to differentiate instruction to appeal to learners with all styles. Here are excerpts from one of their rubrics including the four interests:

- Mastery. “Is the goal of the unit defined in terms of a product or performance? Have students been involved in analyzing the competencies and qualities of the product or performance?”
- Understanding. “Is the unit organized around provocative questions? Are the sources used in the unit sufficiently challenging and based on powerful ideas? Are students able to critique and correct their own and others’ products and ideas?”

- Interpersonal. “How closely connected to the real world are the content and products of the unit? How well designed is the use of audiences, clients, and customers as ways to stimulate reflection and improvement?”
- Self-Expression. “How strong a role does choice play in the unit? How regularly are strategies for creative thinking modeled?” (p. 26).

Wiggins and McTighe (1998) provide guidelines for developing curriculum and assessments that increase student understanding and involvement in their learning. Although not presented as a solution for dropping out, the guidelines can help teachers create engaging classroom instruction. They developed the acronym **WHERE** to guide teachers in designing curricular activities:

- **“Where are we headed?”** Give students reasons for the goal and their responsibilities for performance, and help them see the purpose for the work from their point of view.
- **“Hook the student through engaging and provocative entry points.”** Use effective questions and problems that challenge, focus, and engage students.
- **“Explore and enable/equip.”** Identify learning experiences that allow students to explore big ideas, and provide them with guided instruction and coaching in the skills and knowledge they need.
- **“Reflect and rethink.”** Help students to dig deeper into issues, self-assess and revise their thinking, and refine their learning and the products they create.
- **“Exhibit and evaluate.”** Involve students in final self-assessments, set future goals, and look toward new areas of learning (p. 115-116).

Increasing student engagement requires educators to create or change school conditions to improve the learning environment. Educators can borrow and apply characteristics described by Csikszentmihalyi in his theory *Flow: Optimal Experience*. Curriculum and instruction developed around personal goals, immediate and appropriate feedback, and challenging tasks that are balanced with the skill level of students may help students experience heightened concentration and commitment. In most secondary school settings, extracurricular activities are more likely to reflect these characteristics than academic work. However, classrooms can be structured around these characteristics, for example, through project based or experiential learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Scherer, 2002).

### Career and Technical Education

Career and Technical Education (CTE), the current term used for courses in high school that have been called vocational education, can help increase the relevance of high school for some students and the likelihood they will remain in school. Effective CTE programs include the instructional strategies described above and often integrate aspects of the academic curriculum.

The research on career-focused programs in high schools is thin, and the studies that do exist provide mixed results relative to the positive outcomes of CTE programs as they are currently implemented. Some studies indicate the programs help students at-risk of dropping out to stay in school. Studies also conclude that academic performance is not necessarily greater as a result of CTE participation. Two studies using the same data from

the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (U.S. Department of Education, 2003) had conflicting conclusions. One study examined the “proportion of CTE courses [that students took]... and found that the greater the percentage of CTE in a youth’s high school experience, the lower the probability of youth dropping out,” particularly among low-ability students (Silverberg, Warner, Goodwin, & Fong, cited in Stone, 2004, p. 236). Another analysis found no relationship between students who took three or more labor market preparation courses and a “reduced probability of dropping out of high school” (Plank, cited in Stone, p. 236). This researcher concluded that a balanced combination of CTE and academic courses may reduce the possibility of dropping out. Authors of essays on the future of career and technical education advocate for changes that “upgrade both academic rigor and technical relevance” (Kazis, 2005, p. 1).

Research on career-focused programs and schools addresses dropout prevention as well as the merits of overall CTE programs. “CTE appears to help less-motivated and more at-risk students stay in high school and graduate, yet graduation from a CTE program does not necessarily mean that a student is academically prepared for college-level work or for today’s workplace. Employers would prefer to hire students with college credentials over those with only a high school diploma—and students with a postsecondary credential are more likely to secure a well-paying job than those without one. At the same time, for those who do not continue to college, jobs found with the help of career-focused programs in high school have a significant short- to mid-run labor market payoff, particularly for low-income students and those who are the most at-risk” (Kazis, p. 2).

CTE programs have various nonacademic benefits. According to Kazis, “studies of High Schools That Work sites, Tech Prep, Perkins Cooperative Demonstration sites, and career academies tend to show reduced dropout rates compared to control or comparison groups of students not in CTE programs. In several of these studies, vocational concentrators have lower dropout rates than either general or academic track controls” (p. 12). For example, Plank used the National Educational Longitudinal Study data and concluded “the risk of dropping out was four times higher when students took *no* CTE courses than when students completed three Carnegie units of CTE courses for every four units in academic subjects. In this study, when prior achievement, grades, and student characteristics were taken into account, the combination of four academic and three CTE courses appear to have the greatest positive impact on persistence to graduation” (Kazis, p. 12).

Stone (2004) suggests that strategies that are incorporated into CTE courses benefit students at risk. An important strategy is career guidance, which often includes academic planning, career counseling, job location assistance, and college application assistance. Work-based learning is another component that can support keeping students in school. These programs include strategies such as cooperative education, school-based enterprises, internships and apprenticeships, job shadowing, and mentoring. Mentoring is acknowledged as one of the critical components of a vocationally-based dropout prevention plan” (p. 241).

A New Vision for Career and Technical Education, from the American Youth Policy Forum, “makes the case that there is a great need in today’s classrooms for high-quality CTE—education that integrates rigorous academic coursework with a technical and

occupational curriculum, emphasizes applied teaching and learning, uses the context of careers to help make learning relevant, connects with the labor market and employers, provides ongoing guidance and counseling and exposure to the world of work, and defines pathways from secondary to postsecondary education. However, CTE must embrace all these elements and not be a vestige of high school ‘shop’” (Brand, p. 26).

As the workplace has changed, policymakers and educators have examined the role and content for technical education programs. According to Kazis (2005), although there have been improvements in updating CTE programs and increasing their rigor, “the overall record of CTE, small career-themed schools, work experience, and work-based learning in high school has been disappointing.” He claims that academic rigor is the “most important reform that CTE programs must commit to and pursue aggressively. If CTE ratchets up its academic requirements, it will be “an alternative pathway to postsecondary success, not a lesser track” (p. 6). Some writers point out that the “best CTE programs and school designs point the way for high school reform more generally: greater academic rigor, a clear focus on theme, pathways connecting secondary and postsecondary institutions, and increased time with adults” (p. 7).

\* \* \* \* \*

The comprehensive school improvement efforts highlighted in this chapter hold promise for creating wholesome school environments and improving teaching and learning. If these goals are accomplished, schools will be more successful in adapting to the needs of students and increasing their “holding power” so fewer students drop out. Strategies for creating high performing schools and for closing the achievement gap will serve potential dropouts well.

Although comprehensive efforts have high potential to hold students and improve their educational experiences, there undoubtedly will continue to be students for whom special programs and activities will be necessary, although hopefully the numbers will decrease over time. The next chapter describes specific programs and schools for dropout prevention and dropout recovery or retrieval.

## CHAPTER 3

# TARGETED PREVENTION AND RECOVERY PROGRAMS

Specific programs for dropouts focus on preventing dropouts and recovering students who have dropped out. Prevention programs attempt to serve students at risk of dropping out and, therefore, intervene early to keep students in school. Recovery or re-entry programs recruit students back into an educational setting or support the attainment of a diploma or GED. Dropout programs may be offered within traditional schools, through alternative schools, or through community-based services and support programs.

Prevention strategies include early intervention programs, supplemental in-school and out-of-school enhancement programs and practices, alternative programs, and alternative schools. Recovery strategies may include alternative programs and alternative schools as well. The programs and schools are organized into these categories to help explain their primary purposes. However, the distinctions are not always precise. Some programs could very well be considered both prevention and recovery. This chapter provides examples of programs and services to illustrate the scope of strategies.

Many programs, unfortunately, have not collected sufficient data or conducted rigorous research and evaluation studies to determine their effectiveness. Shargel and Smink (2001) report the evaluation studies of dropout demonstration programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education from 1991–1996. They summarize, “The general findings from an evaluation of twenty selected programs, with data collected from more than 10,000 students, reflected very disappointing results. No program was able to improve all key outcomes examined, such as dropping out, attendance, test scores, and grades. However, the evaluation did show evidence that alternative schools are effective with at-risk students who can demonstrate their commitment to succeed” (p. 119).

In spite of a dearth of experimental studies, anecdotal evidence and case studies reveal promising practices. Rumberger (2001) offers these features common to such programs:

- “A non-threatening environment for learning;
- A caring and committed staff who accepted a personal responsibility for student success;
- A school culture that encourages staff risk-taking, self governance, and professional collegiality;
- A school structure that provided for a low student-teacher ratio and a small size to promote student engagement” (p. 27).

The following sections describe components of effective prevention and recovery strategies described in the research and professional literature.

### **PREVENTION THROUGH EARLY INTERVENTION**

Early intervention programs generally include programs for preschool and elementary children. Schargel and Smink (2001) address early intervention as the first of 15 strategies

for dropout prevention. Within this strategy they include programs and practices such as comprehensive family involvement, solid early childhood education, and strong reading and writing programs. They stress that providing the “best possible classroom instruction from the beginning” is the most effective way to reduce the number of students who may drop out of school (p. 41). They assert that birth-to-three intervention programs have demonstrated that early enrichment can modify a child’s IQ.

An effective preschool program cited frequently in the literature is the High/Scope Perry Pre-School program. An extensive evaluation of the program compared preschool group members with no-preschool group members and followed students through their school careers. The evaluation revealed remarkable outcomes. According to Rumberger (2001), members of the preschool program group experienced social and economic benefits including “reduced crime rate, higher earning, and reduced welfare dependence.” He writes, “In terms of education, one-third as many preschool program group members as no-preschool program group members graduated from regular or adult high school or received GED (71 percent versus 54 percent).” These outcomes occurred 13 years or more after the intervention ended. This study suggests that “early interventions for persons at risk of dropping out can be effective” (p. 26).

Helping One Student To Succeed (HOSTS) is an elementary literacy program that is included in the Government Accountability Office (2005) study of dropout prevention programs and practices. The program is a “structured tutoring program in reading and language arts” (p. 36-37). Schools cited in the research have used the program for increasing the reading ability and self-esteem of at-risk students. The program has been replicated on a relatively large scale. Although elementary students’ reading levels increase in some schools using the program, students have not been tracked over time to determine the program’s effect on graduation and dropout rates. Some Washington school districts have implemented the program in selected elementary schools.

### **PREVENTION THROUGH SUPPLEMENTAL PROGRAMS**

Supplemental support programs often assist identified students within the traditional school. Such support is also offered through out-of-school enhancement programs. Some supplemental services may be considered dropout prevention programs even though they probably do not bear that formal designation. Student assistance, service learning, and mentoring are educational approaches that supplement regular coursework. Suggestions for planning and implementing an in-school dropout prevention program are summarized in the literature (Lovitt, 2000; Schargel & Smink, 2001; Smith, 1991). Guidelines for developing targeted programs are offered later in this chapter.

**Added Academic Support.** Supplemental in-school programs provide additional academic support through a variety of approaches: tutorials, double class periods in targeted content areas such as math or language, before or after-school homework clubs, or activity periods, Saturday school, and summer school. These programs often are intended to help students complete homework and critical courses, and many provide incentives to increase student attendance. Some of these supplemental programs provide students “more of the same” in the way of subject content and teaching strategies. Others offer students



enriched learning opportunities and include community resources such as technology, field trips, or career mentors to help students see relevance in the school work and encourage their “sticking to it.” Some programs have links to vocational education, internships, or part time work. The theme of these activities is to help students see the links between their schooling and their future lives.

**“Pyramid of Intervention.”** A progressive system of intervention and support was created at Adlai Stevenson High School in Illinois as a “collective response” for working with students who are not making satisfactory progress toward learning standards. To frame the school’s efforts to help students who may be struggling, Dufour et al. (2004) pose three questions that should undergird intervention practices:

1. What is it we want all students to learn—by grade level, by course, and by unit of instruction?
2. How will we know when each student has acquired the intended knowledge and skills?
3. How will we respond when students experience initial difficulty so that we can improve upon current levels of learning?” (p. 2-3).

The authors provide a set of interventions to answer the third question in terms of a pyramid that moves from a broad-based approach to increasing levels of support for the few students that warrant it:

- Student support teams which include a counselor, social worker and dean of students who share responsibility for the same group of students and meet weekly to monitor learning progress
- Conferencing and optional tutoring
- Mandatory tutoring program
- A guided study program with no more than 10 students in a given period to provide supervision and assistance
- A mentor program provides two periods of support each day in a small group of 10 students with one teacher. Student earns a credit.

Key to both the guided study and mentor programs is that teachers have opportunity to develop a “connection with students who have typically been alienated from school” (p. 64). The approach has been adopted, or adapted, in other schools in the country.

**Graduation, Reality and Dual Skills.** Graduation, Reality and Dual Skills (GRADS) is a family and consumer science program in Washington that is part of the OSPI career and technical education program. GRADS is an in-school, secondary program for pregnant students and young parents, both female and male. The program provides a “comprehensive instructional program focusing on positive self esteem, pregnancy, parenting, academic achievement, economic independence, and graduation.” The programs provide home and community outreach and on-site childcare program. State data from 2004-2005 indicate that of the 775 students in the program, 64 percent graduated, received a General Education Development (GED) credential, or were continuing in the program. Eighteen percent of these students were school dropouts before enrollment in the program (OSPI, Career and Technical Education Office Report).

**Non-Academic Support.** Students who fail in school or dropout often have a variety of mental, physical, and/or social needs that are unmet. Students of any age who are hungry, abused, neglected, or suffering from some mental or health issues are undoubtedly distracted from their academic studies. Schools over the years have implemented various programs and activities to attempt to address such profound student needs. In-school clinics, counselors and social workers, and referral services have been tried. While these help serve the needs of students, schools often have difficulty finding sufficient resources to offer and sustain such services, and coordination and follow up are problematic.

In Washington state, various programs have been implemented to help address the non-academic needs of students at risk of dropping out. The “Barrier Reduction Funding” allocated through the legislative budget provides resources that, under certain circumstances, can be tapped by vocational skill centers to help meet the basic personal needs of students at risk of academic failure or who have dropped out. These “wrap around” funds can be used for school supplies, classroom resources, transportation, food, clothing, child care, contracts with social services agencies, or counselors or advocates. The New Market Vocational Skills Center, described in Appendix A, uses these funds.

The National Research Council Institute of Medicine report (2004) suggests taking a comprehensive systems approach is advisable for addressing non-academic needs. The authors assert that schools “cannot ignore students’ nonacademic needs,” but they propose that schools focus more strongly on strategies for “building assets rather than on interventions designed to address problems that have already developed” (p. 157). Communities as well as the school and family share the responsibility for developing such strategies. The report suggests that school reform measures can work to alleviate negative school environments that may contribute to students’ non-academic problems. Along with increasing and improving services to meet individual student needs, such school-wide efforts serve as “preventative policy” ( p. 159).

Student assistance programs for young people who have drug and alcohol problems are generally offered as in-school supplemental services. Reconnecting Youth, developed by Eggert at the University of Washington, is a school-based program for high school students that was designed to decrease drug involvement, increase school performance, and decrease emotional distress. The program includes a semester class, activities to promote school bonding, parent involvement as well as a school crisis response plan. Programs to address violence and conflict help make school environments safer which may help keep students in school. Schargel and Smink (2000) list Second Step, a school-based social skills curriculum, Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE), and peer mediation as examples of programs designed to deal with violence and conflict. A safe and supportive school environment is important for student learning and for “holding” students in school, so such programs can legitimately be among the overall strategies considered by schools and districts.

**Service Learning.** Service learning programs, or projects, are examples of supplemental in-school programs. Service learning is a means for addressing the negative conditions that some students experience at school, e.g., little or no academic success, problems getting

along with teachers or peers, and feeling alienated from school. Service learning provides students an opportunity to develop academic, social, and problem-solving skills as well as to enhance their sense of independence, self esteem, and purpose through meaningful projects. Particularly popular in middle schools, service learning provides a “hands-on” relevant context through which students can serve their communities and schools while they learn.

Schargel and Smink (2000) cite research that shows “in more than half of the high-quality service learning schools studied, students showed moderate to strong gains on achievement tests in language arts or reading, improved engagement in school, an improved sense of educational accomplishment, and better homework completion” (p. 103). Other studies also associated service learning with improved achievement as demonstrated by grades or test scores. Additional research is needed, but service learning is a promising strategy.

**Mentoring.** Mentoring has emerged as a strategy for fostering positive relationships, improving learning, and potentially reducing dropouts. Mentoring takes many forms but essentially matches individuals to provide guidance and support in one-on-one relationships or in small groups. Mentoring promotes personal interactions that build healthy relationships among students and among students and adults in a school. Students may be mentored by teachers, community members, or older students. Mentoring may include academic support but does not always. Personal support, social support, and career exploration are also contexts for mentoring.

Mentoring approaches vary. Teachers may be assigned as advocates for identified students. “Invisible” mentoring is a practice in which staff informally and regularly seek out a student with the intention of making personal contacts without making an overt or formal announcement to students (Davis & Race, 2003). Schargel and Smink (2001) list a variety of approaches including traditional mentoring (such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America), group or co-mentoring, peer mentoring (such as Boys and Girls Clubs), team mentoring (with small groups), intergenerational mentoring (such as Foster Grandparents or Retired Senior citizens), and telementoring (such as the Hewlett-Packard Telementor Program). Suggestions for planning and implementing mentoring programs are included in their most recent book (Smink, in Smink & Schargel, 2004).

Mentoring and advisories are two strategies for increasing student sense of belonging and social capital. These strategies are implemented in a variety of ways. A few examples appear in the Appendix (see Granger, Franklin Pierce, and Burlington Edison.)

Several authors describe examples of out-of-school enhancement programs and report evaluation results, which are cited below (Rumberger, 2001; Fashola & Slavin, 1997; Dynarski, 2000).

**Supplemental Program Evaluation.** Evaluations of supplemental programs have been mixed. A case in point, reported by Rumberger, is the Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success or ALAS, a supplemental though quite comprehensive program that addressed family, community, and school factors. Rumberger reports that this program improved middle school students’ school experiences when they were in the program.

Students in the program passed more classes, were absent less often, and accumulated more high school graduation credits than students in a comparison group. The effects were not sustained after the support program ended, however.

Fashola and Slavin report evaluations of six dropout prevention and college attendance programs for Latino students. Dropout intervention for language minority youth include programs such as the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Programs (VYP) which began in Texas and was funded in 1990 for additional states. This program has several goals: improving academic success, improving language skills, strengthening students' self perceptions, and increasing student-school-family partnerships. Secondary students are hired as tutors for young children. ALAS was mentioned above. Other programs include Upward Bound, Project AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), which exists in California schools particularly in San Diego County and was recently implemented in three middle school and four high schools in Federal Way School District in Washington, and Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams), implemented in Texas and discussed in more detail below. MESA (Mathematics Engineering and Science Achievement) focuses on helping middle and high school students succeed in science and mathematics courses and encourages them to attend college. Created in California in 1970, MESA has expanded into other states, including Washington.

Fashola and Slavin point out common themes among the six programs they reviewed:

- Personalization, small group intervention or mentoring, creating meaningful relationships between adults and students.
- Connecting students to an attainable future.
- Targeted academic assistance.
- Providing students status and recognition within the school.

The authors note that not enough evidence exists to determine the most effective or cost effective of these approaches. However, these six programs demonstrate that there is sufficient knowledge about promising programs to incorporate their strategies into dropout interventions.

Dynarski (2000) summarizes evaluations of alternative programs funded through the Federal Dropout Demonstration project. Two supplemental projects for middle school students, for example, are located within regular schools but separate the students from other students for much of the school day. The programs are Project COMET in Miami, Florida, and Project ACCEL in Newark, New Jersey. He writes, "Supplemental programs had almost no impacts on student outcomes. None of the programs affected the dropout rate, and average student grades, test scores, and attendance were similar among treatment and control group students" (p. 3).

### **PREVENTION THROUGH CASE MANAGEMENT APPROACHES**

Several programs and practices that serve potential dropouts provide one-to-one support in the form of social workers, intervention specialists, or other staff. These adult advocates provide consistent and persistent attention to the student at risk. Examples include the Check and Connect Model, Project GRAD, and the recent Workforce Investment Act projects implemented in Washington.

**Check and Connect Model.** The Government Accountability Office report (2005) on dropout prevention highlights this program that provides mentors or adult advocates. This program, implemented in Minneapolis, provides mentoring in an alternative learning environment. The program was implemented first in 1990 for urban middle school students with learning and behavioral problems. The model incorporates “relationship building, individualized and timely intervention, and long-term commitment” (p. 33). Students are referred based on absences, poor academic performance, and behavior. Central to the intervention is a mentor (also called a monitor) who is an advocate and service coordinator. The mentor is described as offering “around the-clock services including monitoring school performance, regularly checking student data (attendance, grades, and suspensions), and identifying and addressing out-of-school issues” as well as often communicating with families (p. 33). One school official reports improvements in attendance and school retention rates since the implementation of the program. Anecdotally, the school staff members say they know the program is working when students come to class every day. The program is funded by a renewable private foundation grant.

**Project GRAD.** Graduation Really Achieves Dreams (Project GRAD) is featured in the recent report of the Government Accountability Office on dropout prevention programs and practices. Project GRAD began in 1989 as a scholarship program in Texas. The program has evolved to include both structural and instructional components. The strategy is a comprehensive school improvement model based on a K-12 feeder school structure with curriculum components for reading and mathematics in kindergarten through grade 8. Other components of the program include school-based social services, which may focus on dropout prevention and family case management, classroom management techniques, and college scholarships. The program has been implemented in some districts across the country (GAO, 2005).

**Workforce Investment Act Partnership Projects.** The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) dropout prevention and intervention projects, implemented in 2005, were jointly planned by the Workforce Board, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Employment Security Department. Grants were distributed to local Workforce Development Councils to form partnerships with high schools with low graduation rates. The projects have targeted at-risk students and dropouts. Most of the projects have employed an intervention specialist or case manager and provide “wrap-around” services if the students meet the eligibility criteria for the WIA program. These projects have had the specific goal of combining WIA dollars with Basic Education Allocation funding to help provide extra resources needed to help targeted students. Results related to retention, earning of credits, and graduation are recorded as part of the evaluation process. Although a full evaluation has not been done to date, early numbers suggest that these projects may be successful in retaining targeted students. A list of the 12 projects are listed in Appendix B.

### **PREVENTION THROUGH SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS**

Since dropout issues are so complex and pervasive, community-wide efforts may be more successful at reducing dropout rates. Schools and districts cannot do the work alone. Many

programs have been developed as community-based partnerships or collaboratives. A few examples are listed below.

**Independent Enhancement Programs.** Independent enhancement programs have been developed and implemented over the years. More recently the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers program through the U. S. Department of Education provides resources for out-of-school supplemental programs. Out-of-school programs serve various student groups and differ in goals and program components. Some supplemental programs specifically serve students of color and poverty. Many are funded through federal or private grants; for example, the Federal School Dropout Demonstration Assistance program, mentioned earlier, operated in 85 different schools and communities in the 1990s (Schargel & Smink, 2001). The programs frequently provide both academic and social support. Some, such as Upward Bound, encourage college attendance.

**Communities in Schools.** An organization that provides out-of-school enhancement as well as some in-school programs is Communities in Schools (formerly Cities in Schools), a national network of community-based organizations that focus on preventing dropout. Its mission is “. . . to champion the connection of needed community resources with schools, to help young people successfully learn, stay in school and prepare for life.” The programs differ by locale but adhere to a set of five basic principles. Communities in Schools believes that every child needs and deserves

- a personal relationship with a caring adult
- a safe place to learn and grow
- a healthy start for a healthy future
- a marketable skill to use upon graduation
- a chance to give back.

In its annual report for 2001–2002, Communities in Schools reports that 72 percent of tracked youth improved their attendance, 81 percent had fewer incidents of discipline, 78 percent improved their academic performance, 95 percent were promoted, 83 percent of eligible seniors graduated, and the overall dropout rate for CIS-tracked students was 3 percent (Morris, 2003). There are several Communities in Schools projects in Washington state, affiliated with school districts, foundations, businesses, and, in one case, a partnership including a professional athletic team (see <http://www.cisnet.org>).

### **PREVENTION THROUGH ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS AND SCHOOLS**

Alternative in-school programs are akin to schools-within-a-school or pull-out programs of various sorts. Alternative classrooms may operate as a self-contained classroom within a traditional school and simply offer varied programs to serve at-risk students. Schools within a school may be housed in traditional schools but offer specialized programs. Some may be quite autonomous. Schools without walls may be attached to the traditional school but deliver educational and training programs at various community locations, perhaps as work-related opportunities (Schargel & Smink, 2001).

**Schools within Schools.** These schools may be created for at-risk students and often are organized by academic or career interests. As mentioned earlier, schools within schools

may identify students with certain risk factors and schedule them together for academic or social support. Legters and Kerr (2000) studied programs for students at critical transition times such as ninth grade. In their study of Maryland high schools, they note that many schools provide supplemental support for ninth grade students in the form of a school-within-a-school, academy or other small learning community, or offer an extra period of instruction for some students. Some high schools have implemented an interdisciplinary team approach for ninth grade students. The authors state that “the group of schools that reported using the school-within-a-school practice in a widespread, sustained way in 1999–00 made substantial gains in promotion and achievement and succeeded in lowering dropout rates from the period between 1993–94 through 1999–00” (p. 18). They assert that the organizational structure played a significant role in the reform process in these schools, although they caution that the small number of schools and available survey data prevent concluding a causal relationship between the practice and the outcome.

Talent Development High Schools (see p. 16) incorporate a number of in-school approaches. School academies are organized around a “ninth-grade success academy” and supplemented with extra time and opportunity for making up failed credits, learning content and skills that may have been missed, and developing study and social skills through special classes. Upper grades in these schools are organized into career academies (McPartland & Jordan, 2000).

The Gates Foundation’s National School District and Network Grants program supports the development of both small learning communities and the redesign of large high schools into groups of small schools. As the program is evaluated over a five-year period and the schools mature, information on successful models and student outcomes will become available. In addition, the Foundation has funded a number of Washington state schools to create model schools that provide small, personalized learning environments that foster high achievement for all students.

**Alternative Education.** Alternative education is an inclusive term used to describe alternative learning experiences and programs that may or may not be linked closely with traditional schools. Some of these programs are self-paced, competency-based, and feature computer-assisted curriculum and/or independent study. Some serve home-schooled students and provide classes or laboratory experiences that are difficult to teach at home, such as music or science laboratories. Many alternative programs provide flexible schedules and reduced numbers of days or hours in class. Some programs are contract-based so students meet regularly with an instructional advisor but do not attend classes. Some are designed primarily to assist students in returning to the comprehensive high school; these re-entry programs provide skills and help students improve attendance. Alternative programs abound in Washington state, but few evaluations have been conducted on their effectiveness.

**Alternative Schools.** Alternative schools, sometimes called second-chance schools, are created as separate organizations for potential dropouts or to recruit dropouts back into school. The definition of an alternative education school, according to the Common Core of Data, is “a public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an

adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education” (cited in Lehr, Moreau, Lanners, & Lange, 2003, p. 2). These schools take on various forms.

In 2001 the U.S. Department of Education funded the Alternative Schools Research Project, a multi-year study that also includes special education concerns. According to a preliminary report of the study, based on a survey of state personnel, alternative schools most often serve students with a history of poor attendance, behavior problems, suspension or expulsion, learning difficulties, external stressors, social/emotional problems, and referral from court systems.

Alternative schools or learning centers may have a specific focus or theme. For example, they may focus on parenting skills and/or offer special job skills. They may be located in business environments (in store fronts), community centers, or they may have buildings constructed for their needs. These schools are generally characterized by small numbers of students, caring cultures, and relative autonomy in governance.

Schargel and Smink (2001) list several educational practices commonly found in alternative schools:

- “A maximum teacher / student ratio of 1:10
- A small student base not exceeding 250 students
- A clearly stated mission and discipline code
- Caring faculty with continual staff development
- School staff having high expectations for student achievement
- A learning program specific to the student’s expectations and learning style
- A flexible school schedule with community involvement and support
- Total commitment to help each student achieve success” (p. 117).

An extensive study of alternative schools was conducted by Wehlage et al. (1989) and reported in their book *Reducing the Risk: Schools as Communities of Support*. The researchers conducted a search for effective schools and received nominations from key informants. From a list of more than sixty schools, they ultimately selected fourteen to study. Four of these programs are mentioned here to illustrate a range of program approaches.

- Media Academy, Fremont High School, Oakland, California, is a school-within-a-school that serves inner city Black and Hispanic students. It offers an academic curriculum with hands-on experiences.
- Two Majors at a Time (TMAT) at Orr Community Academy in Chicago, Illinois, provides students the opportunity to increase their learning time in given subjects.
- Wayne Enrichment Center in Indianapolis focuses on family and workplace as the means for improving student relationships and work habits.
- New Futures School, Albuquerque, New Mexico, is a program that serves pregnant or mothering teens.

A description of AIM (Alternative Instructional Methods) High School, an alternative school in Snohomish, Washington, that grants its own diploma, appears in Appendix A.



**Schools of Choice.** Magnet and charter schools are types of alternative schools that have potential to serve students at risk of dropping out. These categories of schools are commonly called “schools of choice.” Magnet schools typically focus on selected curriculum areas with specialized teachers. Charter schools may be theme-oriented or implement other features around program, behavior, or expectations. Charter schools operate in some states as autonomous educational entities that receive state support without having to meet the usual regulatory provisions of public schools. In some cities, Community-Based Organizations (CBO) provide alternative schools, often through partnerships between community groups and school districts. CBO high schools are frequently funded as charter schools, and some provide services for older students (ages 18-24) who may be “hard to teach, hard to reach youth.” The CBO schools use many of the same practices found in other restructured schools: small learning communities, reduced student-teacher ratios, and more individualized, experiential, and interest-based approaches to learning ....” (Amen, DiMaggio, & Warren, 2003, p. vi).

Coalition Campus Schools in New York, a form of magnet schools, have improved graduation rates and lowered dropout rates by making completion of school an integral part of the school programs. Students in these schools, who represent a diverse population, are more likely to graduate, remain in school beyond the four-year period if needed to complete high school, and to attend college than students in other city schools. Central Park East Secondary School, a pioneering member of Coalition of Essential Schools, is featured often in the reform literature. Among other significant features, the school incorporates expectations for graduation through the coursework over the students’ school career (Ancess & Wichterle, 2001).

Cyber schools, or virtual schools, are a recent addition to the list of potential alternative schools available for dropout prevention or recovery. *The New York Times* described the Western Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School and the students who were graduating from high school in a June 2003 article. The article reports the increasing number of these schools: 67 schools with nearly 16,000 students in states such as Pennsylvania, California, Washington, Ohio, Florida, Arizona, and 11 other states. Several students described the problems they experienced getting along in traditional schools and their preference for computer-based education. Although online learning and virtual classrooms may be a workable approach for some students, issues and concerns arise over accountability, quality of education, and the impact of limited or sporadic contact with other people (Rimer, 2003).

### **RECOVERY THROUGH CONTINUATION SCHOOLS OR PROGRAMS**

Other examples of alternative school models are Middle Colleges and adult high schools found on community college campuses. Another example of a recovery program is the Job Corps. These models serve many students who have severed connections with the regular high school. They may also enroll students who are on the verge of dropping out. Examples of school strategies that help student return to school or to recapture credits to keep students on track to graduate are included in Appendix A (see descriptions for New Market Vocational Skills Center and Auburn Riverside High School). Other projects have been

developed in partnerships between the Workforce Training Board regional offices, school districts, educational service districts, and other entities. The Workforce Investment Act has provided grant funding for several of these projects. While these initiatives show promise, they are too recent to be formally evaluated (see Appendix B).

**Middle Colleges.** The Middle College concept was developed in 1974 in New York as a partnership between City University and the Board of Education. Middle Colleges are alternative high schools housed on community college campuses designed to give disengaged high school students a fresh start. Students served are often bright students who do not fit into the traditional high school. Since it began, the program has grown to college campuses around the country. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation recently provided grants to start more of these schools.

Middle Colleges generally strive to improve attendance, academic performance, graduation rates, job placement rates, and encourage students to pursue higher education. The programs do not include many non-academic programs. They generally offer academic counseling, small classes, tutoring, and staff support. Many require internships of some type. Because these programs are located on community college sites, they help bridge secondary and higher education by providing proximity to college students as peer role models. They may also offer dual enrollment to allow students to receive both college and high school credit (Donahoo, 2002).

Seattle Community College campuses include Middle Colleges, each of which has a somewhat different focus. These are South Seattle Community College, Indian Heritage at North Seattle Community College, and the Middle College High School Education Resource Center at Northgate Mall. The programs serve students age 16–20 who have dropped out or are near dropping out. The students who are admitted to these programs are screened to ensure that they are motivated to succeed. Graduates receive a high school diploma through Seattle Public Schools.

Dynarski (2000) includes the Middle College High School in Seattle in his evaluation of dropout programs. The evaluation of this program reports “higher high school completion rates and lower GED completion rate for students whose characteristics suggested that they were least likely to drop out (termed ‘low risk’ students . . . though most were at some risk of dropping out). The school also reduced dropping out for high-risk students” (p. 6).

Career Education Options Program, a dropout recovery program at Shoreline Community College in Seattle, was recognized by the National Dropout Prevention Network for helping students stay in school and improving their employment opportunities. This program works with OSPI, Shoreline School District, and the King County Work Training Program to fund tuition, books, supplies, and transportation in order to help students earn a professional-technical associate degree or a GED. Launched in 1995, the program served 514 students in 2002-03. About 80 students complete their GED annually, with nearly all of them continuing their education by taking college classes.

**Adult High Schools.** Adult High School Completion Programs exist on many community college campuses. Adult students in these programs, whose age can exceed 21 years, earn a

Washington State Adult High School diploma from the community college, which generally requires fewer credits, rather than a regular high school diploma. These programs provide the core curriculum required to meet state high school graduation requirements. Instructors and counselors are committed to meeting the needs of adult students. The programs offer some flexibility to adapt to the personal and family needs of adults. Harrell (1999) describes the program at Edmonds Community College in Lynnwood, Washington, in her study of adult high school students. The impact of the new state standards for graduation—including exit exams and graduation projects—on adult programs at community colleges remains to be seen. Students who receive an adult diploma in these settings are considered to be graduates with a regular diploma under *No Child Left Behind*.

**Job Corps.** The national Job Corps is another example of a continuation or recovery program and provides integrated academic, vocational, and social skills training for disadvantaged youth. Job Corps, created in 1964, is an education and job training program for at-risk young people age 16–24. The program is a public-private partnership administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment & Training Administration, and Office of Youth Services. The program provides career development services, assists young adults in obtaining the skills they need for their goals, and provides support to launch them into jobs or further education. Since it began, the Job Corps has served more than two million young people. Four Job Corps Centers in Washington serve roughly 200–325 students each, depending on program capacity, and offer a range of vocational offerings. (More information is available on the Job Corps Web site at <http://www.jobcorps.org/>).

**GED Preparation Programs.** Some alternative programs primarily help students complete the General Education Development (GED) certification. GED certificates are earned by students who leave traditional high schools. Dynarski (2000) describes three alternative schools in this category. Flowers with Care Program, in Queens, New York, and Metropolitan Youth Academy, in St. Louis, Missouri, were developed to help students prepare for the GED. Student Training and Re-entry Program in Tulsa, Oklahoma, is “a transition program” for high school dropouts created to help students determine their educational goals, most often the GED certification. These programs do help students earn their GED certificates. Students in these programs are also slightly more likely to complete their diplomas than control group students. Students who start in GED preparation programs can return to high school or another program that leads to a diploma. Of these programs, the St. Louis program had the largest impact, “with 39 percent of the treatment group earning a GED or a high school diploma within three years, compared to 22 percent of control group students” (p. 8).

According to the requirements of *No Child Left Behind*, students who earn a GED certificate are considered dropouts. Since the law requires a graduation rate indicator for a school and district to make adequate yearly progress, this provision may encourage educators to find ways to help students stay in school rather than leave to pursue a GED. However, the law may also discourage schools and districts from establishing dropout recovery programs that would be helpful to students but could potentially lower the graduation rate if these students do not graduate with a regular diploma.

Alternative schools in all categories offer important options for students. The numbers of alternative schools have increased significantly in the last 15 years—the number grew from about 450 in 1988 to approximately 11,000 in 2000 (Thomas, 2003). Clearly “no tolerance” policies have been responsible for the creation of some of these alternative placements. The quality of these schools is uneven, however. Often accountability is limited, and the schools may suffer from limited funding and be seen as less legitimate than traditional schools. In the studies of alternative schools discussed in this chapter, school staff describes the struggle to remain “alive” as an entity. Mainstream teachers and administrators may minimize the importance of the alternative school, believe they lack standards, and that they are little more than “holding pens” for some difficult students. Alternative schools must ensure rigorous academic learning as well as create supportive environments that welcome, value, and nurture young people.

### **GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING TARGETED PROGRAMS**

Researchers suggest some guidelines to assist educators and policymakers in developing programs for dropout prevention and recovery. Based on a review of processes commonly used to create programs for at-risk students, Smith (1991) offers six planning steps:

- “Identification of student population to be served
- Formation of a collaborative team
- Identification of program vision and goals
- Research into programs that have demonstrated success in working with the target population
- Development of proposal and implementation strategies, including the identification of potential supporters and sources of funding
- Evaluation of program outcomes: creation of an evaluation process aimed at measuring changes in selected student outcome measures to demonstrate the program’s effectiveness in working with its target population” (p. 45).

Smith also offers “positive features” found in effective programs that can guide planning:

- “A small-enough student population to allow individuals to feel that they are members of a supportive and personally meaningful school community
- A teacher culture that emphasizes the adoption of an extended role with students that includes counseling and mentoring as well as classroom instruction
- A daily or weekly schedule that permits teachers and students as well as teachers and teachers to support one another and participate in the governance of the school
- Grouping and scheduling practices that allow students to experience long-term rather than short-term relations with teachers
- Learning activities that demonstrate to students a clear link between what is taught in school and the skills needed in desirable workplaces
- Curriculum and instructional practices that are responsive to student concerns and interests
- Grading practices, including the scheduling of academic units, that are more sensitive to the characteristics of students who have not responded well to traditional classrooms

- Close monitoring of student behavior and academic performance in an effort to provide assistance rather than administer punishment
- Recognition and rewards for incremental signs of improvement
- Activities, including community service and peer tutoring, that allow students to know that they are needed
- Enough program autonomy from central office directives and policies to permit needed forms of experimentation
- Administrative practices that encourage teacher collaboration and accountability” (p. 71).

Conrath (cited in Lovitt, 2000) provides this set of suggestions for designing effective programs:

- “Make the program part of a systemwide, K through 12 strategy
- Identify which students will be best served by the program
- Clarify roles within the program
- Expect students to live up to high ethical and intellectual standards—do not assume students are lacking ability and do not insult by using derogatory labels or patronizing them
- Teach discipline and responsibility—do not confuse imposing obedience with teaching discipline
- Avoid treating student anonymously or impersonally
- Present an alternative strategy for learning—require students to do real schoolwork ... to mature intellectually
- Locate the program in a place where students feel a sense of belonging
- Balance the program between fitting into the total school program and having enough autonomy to allow the kinds of decisions teachers must make in order to assist students who are at risk
- Make strong efforts to help discouraged students see the point of what they are being asked to do and how it will improve their lives” (p. 8).

The quality of staff is also an important consideration. Conrath notes that teachers who are effective in dropout prevention programs exemplify “toughness (ethical, emotional, and intellectual), compassion, professionalism, seriousness, knowledge, creativity, authoritativeness —through expertise and sense of competence, not constantly quoting rules—sense of purpose, and cultured competence” (p. 9-10).

Conrath further describes the students who may be candidates for these programs. They need:

- “Structure and predictability
- Flexible means and consistent ends: Provide different approaches (traditional ones have not worked)
- High ethical and intellectual expectations: Realize these students are discouraged; they are not dumb
- ‘Do-able’ academic work: Select work that provides intellectual challenges, without academic threats

- Contact with adults: Provide engagement with adults that students can trust and respect
- Adult leadership: Handle student confrontations with skill and compassion, not as ego threats or battles to be won
- Serious, useful schoolwork: Be sure students know the use of the work they are doing
- Trust: Do not assume these students have chosen failure; help them learn to break the pattern
- Increased self esteem: Provide opportunities for achievement in worthwhile endeavors” (p. 10-11).

More information on effective dropout prevention and recovery programs is expected from the *What Works Clearinghouse* in early 2006.

\* \* \* \* \*

Although there is not yet sufficient evidence on the effectiveness of most targeted programs for potential dropouts, many have elements that can make a difference for students. Continuing to provide targeted programs will be necessary along with comprehensive school improvement to meet the needs of all students who may struggle in the traditional contemporary school.

## CHAPTER 4

# IMPLICATIONS

This final chapter discusses recommendations and suggestions that emerge from the research reviewed for this report. The legislature requested recommendations regarding the most promising practices. However, the available research studies do not give sufficient and clear evidence to compare among promising practices, so we cannot quantify the most promising among the programs and practices that are included in this report. Many variables influence decisions regarding adoptions of programs, including factors related to community or district values, educational philosophy, and availability of resources. In addition, the quality of implementation may differ from place to place so that outcomes for the same strategies may vary widely. In other words, what works best in one location may not be the best option in another location.

Rather than ranking programs and practices, we believe the characteristics of each should be reviewed when making decisions about adopting, creating, or implementing dropout prevention or recovery strategies. Effective dropout programs and practices:

- Create school environments that are inviting, warm, and supportive;
- Provide or assist students in obtaining social, health, and other personal resources that help students handle obstacles to their learning and help meet their emergent basic needs;
- Personalize programs with academic challenge and learning support as needed;
- Provide opportunities for students to apply their learning in relevant, real world situations and help them see the connections to their own futures; and
- Enhance personal relationships with caring adults through organizational structures that provide time and opportunity.

The above general principles emerge from the research and can guide efforts to reduce the dropout rate and help students finish school. Despite our reticence to make specific recommendations about the most promising programs and practices, action has already been taken that has reduced the dropout rates in specific schools. But addressing the dropout problem must be done on a wider scale. It will take a collective effort—the problem is simply too pervasive and the causes too widespread for the education community to address the problem by itself. Hence, the recommendations and suggestions below relate mainly to educators and local school administrators and policymakers, but action is also needed at the state level.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS AND SCHOOL POLICYMAKERS**

Educators, school and district administrators, and school boards need to review school and district policies and procedures to see if they may have unintended consequences and contribute to students leaving school before graduation. Steps need to be taken to improve or change ineffective policies, practices, and programs or create new ones. Undertaking

school-wide reform efforts is also worth considering. The section discusses specific areas for review and possible change.

### **School and District Policies and Practices**

A number of policies and practices are associated with increased dropouts, and new strategies can be considered to reduce the likelihood that students will leave school before graduation. Examining school and district policies and practices is a necessary first step to reducing the negative impact they may have on at-risk students. The following topics and questions provide some suggestions for this process.

**Discipline and Attendance Rules** Schools and districts need to examine regulations and their implementation to be sure discipline policies are fair and respectful of individuals from diverse backgrounds. Do students understand the policies? What are the causes of suspensions and expulsions? Do “no tolerance” policies affect some groups of students more than others? Are discipline and attendance policies fairly and equitably applied? What alternatives are used to keep students in school while dealing with disciplinary and attendance issues?

**High Standards and Grading Practices** Schools and districts need to examine their learning targets, the supports in place to assist students in meeting them, and the practices for grading students. Are learning standards aligned with the state requirements? Are the standards well understood by students and families? Are sufficient supports in place to ensure students learn to high standards? Are grading practices fair, equitable, and consistent across courses and grade levels? Are there school patterns of course failures? Do teachers believe some students must fail in order to maintain academic standards? What happens when a student falls behind? Are there frequent opportunities to “recapture” grades and credits to help keep students on track for graduation?

**Accommodating Personal Crises** Flexibility in the system is needed to accommodate individuals whose life circumstances may disrupt their educational careers. The current emphasis for on-time graduation may obscure the need some students have to take time out to get their lives in order. The age-grade rigidity in American schools makes it difficult for students who face overwhelming life circumstances to leave and return to school without stigma. A provision for more fluid enrollment and attendance policies, while a major departure from current practice, bears consideration. Some educational experts have long called for a system that promotes continuous progress without the arbitrary age-grade link that now pervades U.S. schools. What policies address issues of students returning to school after long personal illness or crisis? What happens when students are absent for extended time periods for illness or emergencies, or withdraw due to personal crisis? How do school and district policies and procedures accommodate students’ re-entry to school?

**Retention** Schools and districts need to examine policies related to retaining students in grade. Do students have the opportunity to learn the Essential Academic Learning Requirement and Grade Level Expectations? Do students have access to qualified teachers?



Do students have appropriate instructional materials? What alternatives to retention are in place in a school?

Special Education and Remediation Programs Schools and districts need to review remediation and special education programs and services. Are students appropriately identified and provided needed services? Are students of color disproportionately assigned to remedial programs or certain special education categories? Do staff attitudes and behaviors reflect a belief that students can achieve the learning standards? Are students taught the state standards (essential academic learning requirements) and provided appropriate support to reach them? Do students receive the instruction they need so they can complete their programs and obtain a diploma?

Transitions Schools and districts need to collect and examine data regarding student progress during transitional periods, i.e., elementary to middle school and middle school to high school. Are assistance programs in place to help students meet the challenges of changing schools? Do counselors help students make choices about their school programs? Are adult advocates, mentors, or advisors responsible for assisting students with social and academic needs?

Course Content and Instruction Schools and districts need to examine their course offerings, the instructional methods used, and instructional materials. Are courses sufficiently rigorous? Are students expected to do quality work? Is content relevant? Do students have the opportunity to apply what they learn to “real world” situations? Is student work valued and displayed?

School Climate and Relationships Schools need to examine the learning environment and quality of relationships among students and teachers. Do students feel they belong? Do teachers know their students well? Are the relationships between students and teachers positive? Do teachers believe that students can learn? Are students respected and valued? Do students understand the importance of effort in achieving their goals?

Evaluation of Alternative Programs and Practices Schools and districts need to evaluate alternative programs and practices. Are students receiving the personal and academic support they need? Are programs stable? Do programs have sufficient resources and staff to be high quality? Are the programs evaluated to determine their effectiveness in reducing dropout and helping students receive a diploma? Are these alternative schools and programs considered high-status organizations?

### **School Restructuring**

In addition to reviewing policies and practices, educators may want to consider undertaking more comprehensive school-wide reform efforts. Components of comprehensive school improvement that potentially impact dropout rates include processes for changing schools, using data, and strategies for closing the achievement gap and improving learning. Other elements of school reform are increasing family and community involvement, increasing

and reallocating resources, providing effective targeted dropout prevention and recovery programs, and providing pertinent professional development.

Implementing the Characteristics of Effective Schools The professional and research literature on dropouts adds even more credence to the importance of implementing the characteristics of effective schools. If schools are to become positive communities of support and learning, they will need to be changed in many respects. Restructuring or comprehensive school improvement provides a plan and process for considering the questions noted above and making changes needed to improve schools for all students and for keeping potential dropouts in school.

Closing the Achievement Gap Implementing the strategies for closing the achievement gap also will help reduce student dropout. Many students who struggle academically, often students of color and in poverty, become dropouts. Students who drop out may be those who find schools uncomfortable and even hostile places and who may lack access to quality programs, teachers, or culturally responsive classrooms. Fundamental to closing the achievement gap and reducing dropout are the need to change beliefs and attitudes, build positive relationships, and create social capital for students.

Involving Families and Community The involvement of family and community is an important component in the characteristics of effective schools, strategies for closing the achievement gap, and comprehensive school-wide improvement models. The entire community has a responsibility for valuing young people, for mentoring them to increase social capital through relationships, and providing resources needed to create and expand targeted programs and activities for students. Schools and districts need to take the initiative in bridging school, family, and community because educators cannot solve the problem alone.

Gathering Accurate Data To obtain accurate information regarding graduation and dropout rates, record keeping of school attendance, school completion, and student whereabouts will need to be improved. Better data collection will require the use of a state system for identifying and tracking students as they move within the system. In addition, school staff must receive appropriate training so that definitions are clearly understood and consistently applied. Moreover, accurate records must be maintained and the data carefully analyzed and reported.

Providing Sufficient Resources When dropout rates fall significantly, budget and school facilities will be impacted. If all students were to continue through their senior year to graduation, classroom space, materials, teachers, and other resources would have to be increased to meet the growth in the number of students. Potentially class sizes could increase and enrollment in school buildings in some districts could be over capacity. This would be a “nice problem” and surely worth solving if the result would be larger numbers of students learning to high standards and graduating with a meaningful diploma and the knowledge and skills to meet the world’s challenges.

Providing Effective Targeted Programs Implementing targeted programs for dropout prevention and recovery will be necessary. Improving existing schools as an umbrella prevention measure is ideal. Even with significant changes in schools as suggested above, some students will undoubtedly continue to decide to leave the regular school early or will be pushed out because of some grievous issue. All the approaches described in chapter three—a continuum of programs and services from early intervention to adult high schools and continuing education—fill a need. Alternative schools and programs must also meet high standards, offer relevant and rigorous academic curriculum, and provide supportive and nurturing environments for students. Some students who have not returned to school are in need of opportunities to complete their education. An aggressive system for identifying and recruiting these students back into the educational system is necessary once effective programs are in place.

Providing Pertinent Professional Development The changes inherent in the reform strategies discussed in this document require retooling and deepening the knowledge and skills of educators. Extensive professional development will be needed for addressing the dropout issue as well as addressing the achievement gap and improving learning for each student. Professional development should include information on the complexities of dropping out, students who are at risk, and the principles of learning and pedagogy needed to help diverse students learn the state standards. Educators also need to strengthen their beliefs in the value of each child and their own ability to teach each child.

## **STATE SUPPORT**

The state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction has taken leadership in implementing some of the suggestions above. *The Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools* are the basis for considerable school improvement effort in the state. Assistance for school improvement and restructuring are occurring through partnerships with OSPI, educational service districts, school districts and other educational organizations. Identifying exemplary schools and providing opportunities for educators to share their successes and challenges are included in the state-wide institutes sponsored by OSPI. Continued support of these efforts will be required.

OSPI also has a role in supporting programs and schools targeted for dropout prevention and recovery. Expanding the work of educational reform to more directly encompass dropout prevention and recovery programs is an appropriate next step to increase visibility and to provide legitimacy to these programs. Providing information on successful programs, supporting evaluations of programs, increasing the status of alternative programs, and providing leadership in developing appropriate curriculum and teaching strategies are functions the agency may fill.

The Legislature, State Board of Education and other policy makers need to make reducing and preventing dropouts a higher priority. Over the years, the resolve to “do something” to reduce dropouts has waxed and waned. Reducing and preventing dropouts requires creative and thoughtful action as well as resources to create programs, improve practices, and to

sustain the efforts over time. Although funds for “start up” programs do increase services to students, too often they are short lived: when the funding goes away, so do the programs.

Undoubtedly, increasing graduation rates and reducing dropout rates will require additional resources to fund “wrap around” services for students, provide professional development to increase the knowledge and skills of staff, and implement strategies to improve school climate. The Legislature currently provides “Barrier Reduction Funds” that can be used, under certain circumstances, to help students meet obstacles to their schooling. An increase in the amount of funding and extending the funding beyond skills center to comprehensive high schools may be a wise investment in helping students successfully complete their schooling. Increasing flexibility in the administration of some programs for high school may also be in order as rigidity of some rules exacerbates problems for some students at risk. Finally, providing funds to support more rigorous evaluations of existing programs would help identify the most promising programs and practices for preventing dropout.

Thousands of individual students are represented in the impersonal dropout statistics each year. Thus, the twin goals of reducing dropout rates and increasing graduation rates are critical to schools, districts, the state, and the nation. We must find the required additional commitment, resources, and political will to help each student finish high school. There can be no “throw-away” children.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, K.L., Entwisle, D.R., & Kabbani, N. (2001). "The Dropout Process in Life Course Perspective: Early Risk Factors at Home and School." *Teachers College Record*. 103(5). <http://tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentID=10825>
- Amen, K.A., DiMaggio, M. with Warren, L.B. (2003). *CBO High Schools: Their Value and Their Needs in An Era of Accountability*. Council of Chief State School Officers.
- American Institutes for Research (AIR) & SRI International. (2003). *High Time for High School Reform: Early Findings from the Evaluation of the National School District and Network Grants Program*. Prepared for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Seattle, WA.  
<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Education/ResearchAndEvaluation/Evaluation/NHSDGEvaluation.htm>
- Ancess, J. & Wichterle, S.O. (2001). *Making School Completion Integral to School Purpose & Design*. Paper presented at the Conference on Dropouts in America: How severe is the problem? What do we know about intervention and prevention? Civil Rights Project. Graduate School of Education. Harvard University.  
<http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/dropouts/ancess.pdf>
- Barth, P. (2003). A Common Core Curriculum for the New Century. *Thinking K–16*. 7(1). Washington DC: Education Trust.
- Benard, B. (1993). Fostering Resiliency in Kids. *Educational Leadership*. 53(3).
- Brand, B. (2005). What a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Career and Technical Education System Could Look Like. In *Remaking Career and Technical Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: What Role for High School Programs?* Jobs for the Future and The Aspen Institute.
- Bransford, J.D., Brown, A.L., & Cocking, R.R. (Eds.). (2000). *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*. National Research Council. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Bottoms, G. (2004). *Using Rigor, Relevance and Relationships to Improve Student Achievement: How Some Schools Do It*. Southern Regional Education Board.  
[www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/Outstanding/04v08\\_2004%20Outstanding%20Practices.pdf](http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/Outstanding/04v08_2004%20Outstanding%20Practices.pdf)
- Bylsma, P. & Ireland, L. (2005). *Graduation and Dropout Statistics for Washington's Counties, Districts, and Schools: Final Report, School Year 2003–2004*. Olympia, WA: OSPI.
- Chavkin, N.F. & Gonzalez, J. (2000). *Mexican Immigrant Youth and Resiliency: Research and Promising Programs*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. ED447990 <http://www.ericdigests.org/2001-3/mexican.htm>

## Bibliography

- Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. (2000). *Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline*. Report from A National Summit on Zero Tolerance. Washington, DC.
- Conchas, G.Q. (2001). Structuring Failure and Success: Understanding the Variability in Latino School Engagement. *Harvard Educational Review*. 71(3).
- Corbett, D., Wilson, B., & Williams, B. (2002). *Effort and Excellence in Urban Classrooms: Expecting—and Getting—Success with All Students*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Cotton, K. (1996). *School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance*. School Improvement Research Series. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/10/c020.html>
- Croninger, R. & Lee, V.E. (2001). Social Capital and Dropping Out of High School: Benefits to At-Risk Students of Teachers' Support and Guidance. *Teachers College Record*. 103(4). <http://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentID=10776>
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2002). *Redesigning Schools: What Matters and What Works*. School Redesign Network at Stanford University. <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Education/ResearchAndEvaluation/Research/HSImprovement.htm>
- Darling-Hammond, L. Ancess, J. & Ort, S.W. (2002). Reinventing High School: Outcomes of the Coalition Campus Schools Project. *American Educational Research Journal* 39(3).
- Davis, D. & Race, L. (2003). *A Quick-Start Guide to Building Assets in Your School: Moving from Incidental to Intentional*. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute.
- Day, J.C. & Newburger, E.C. (2002). *The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earning*. Economics and Statistics Administration. U. S. Department of Commerce.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. New York: The New Press.
- Demmert, Jr., W.G. (2001). *Improving Academic Performance Among Native American Students: A Review of the Research Literature*. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

## Bibliography

- Deschenes, S., Tyack, D., & Cuban, L. (2001). Mismatch: Historical Perspectives on Schools and Students Who Don't Fit Them. *Teachers College Record*. 103(4). <http://www.tcrecord.org/PrintContent.asp?ContentID=10773>
- Donahoo, S. (2002). Middle College High Schools: Bridging the Gap between High School and College. *Parent News*.
- Dufour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R. & Karhanek, G. (2004). *Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.
- Duttweiler, P.C. (2004). Systemic Renewal: What Works? In Smink, J. & Schargel, F.P. *Helping Students Graduate: A Strategic Approach to Dropout Prevention*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.
- Dynarski, M. (2000). *Making Do with Less: Interpreting the Evidence from Recent Federal Evaluations of Dropout-Prevention Programs*. Paper prepared for the Conference on Dropouts in America: How severe is the problem? What do we know about intervention and prevention? Civil Rights Project. Graduate School of Education. Harvard University. <http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/dropouts/dynarski.pdf>
- Dynarski, M. (2004). Interpreting the Evidence from Recent Federal Evaluations of Dropout-Prevention Programs: The State of Scientific Research. In Orfield, G. (Ed.) *Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Edmonds, R. (1979). Effective Schools for the Urban Poor. *Educational Leadership*. 37(1).
- Eggert, L.L., Program Developer. *Reconnecting Youth: A Peer Group Approach to Building Life Skills*. School of Nursing. University of Washington. Seattle, WA. [http://modelprograms.samhsa.gov/template\\_cf.cfm?page=model\\_list#Model](http://modelprograms.samhsa.gov/template_cf.cfm?page=model_list#Model)
- Farrell, E. (1990). *Hanging In and Dropping Out: Voices of At-Risk High School Students*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Fashola, O.S. & Slavin, R.E. (1997). *Effective Dropout Prevention and College Attendance Programs for Latino Students*. <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/pubs/hdp/4/>
- Ferguson, R.F. (1998). Teachers' Perceptions and Expectations and the Black-White Test Score Gap. In Jencks, C. & Phillips, M. (Eds.). *The Black-White Test Score Gap*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press.
- Finn, J.D. (1989). Withdrawing from School. *Review of Educational Research*. 59(2).

## Bibliography

- Finn, J.D., Pannozzo, G.M., & Achilles, C.M. (2003). The “Why’s” of Class Size: Student Behavior in Small Classes. *Review of Educational Research*. 73(3).
- Frome, P. (2001). *High Schools That Work: Findings from the 1996-1998 Assessments*. Research Triangle Institute for U.S. Department of Education.
- Fry, R. (2003). *Hispanic Youth Dropping Out of U.S. Schools: Measuring the Challenge*. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.  
[www.pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=19](http://www.pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=19)
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gotbaum, B. (2002). *Pushing Out At-Risk Students: An Analysis of High School Discharge Figures*. A Report by the Public Advocate for the City of New York & Advocates for Children. [www.advocatesforchildren.org/pubs/formulaforchange.html](http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/pubs/formulaforchange.html)
- Guilford County Schools’ Middle College High School Program. (no date). *The History and Purpose of the National Middle College Movement*.  
<http://schools.Guilford.k12.nc.us/spages/gmc/history.shtml>
- Guldin, G.E. (2002). *Cultural Diversity in School: A Guide for School Board Members and School Administrators*. Olympia, WA: Washington State School Directors’ Association.
- Ham, S., Doolittle, F.D., Holton, G.I. with Ventura, A.M. & Jackson, R. (2000). *Project GRAD Newark: Building the Foundation for Improved Student Performance*. The Pre-Curricular Phase of Project GRAD Newark. Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.
- Harrell, B.C. (1999). *Finishing Up the Past and Working Toward the Future: Successful Adult High School Graduates at a Community College Share Their Stories*. Unpublished Masters’ Thesis. Antioch University-Seattle.
- Hixson, J. (1993). *Redefining the Issues: Who's at Risk and Why*. Revision of a paper originally presented in 1983 at “Reducing the Risks,” a workshop presented by the Midwest Regional Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities.
- Hoffman, N. & Vargas, J. (2005). *Integrating Grades 9 Through 14: State Policies to Support and Sustain Early College High Schools*. Jobs for the Future.
- Jackson, A.W. & Davis, G.A. (2000). *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. A Report of Carnegie Corporation of New York. New York: Teachers College Press.



## Bibliography

- Jurich, S. & Estes, S. (2000). High Schools That Work. In *Raising Academic Achievement: A Study of 20 Successful Programs*. American Youth Policy Forum.
- Kazis, R. (2005). What We Know about Secondary Schools and Programs that Link School and Work. In *Remaking Career and Technical Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: What role for High School Programs?* Jobs for the Future and Aspen Institute.
- Kemple, J.J., Herlihy, C.M. & Smith, T.J. (2005). *Making Progress Toward Graduation: Evidence from the Talent Development High School Model*. Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.  
<http://www.mdrc.org/publications/408/full.pdf>
- Kemple, J.J. & Snipes, J.C. (2000). *Career Academies. Impacts on Students' Engagement and Performance in High Schools*. Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.
- Lan, W. & Lanthier, R. (2003). Changes in Students' Academic Performance and Perceptions of School and Self Before Dropping Out of Schools. *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk*. 8(3).
- LeCompte, M.D. & Dworkin, A.G. (1991). *Giving Up on School: Student Dropouts and Teacher Burnouts*. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Lee, V.E. & Burkam, D.T. (2000). *Dropping Out of High School: The Role of School Organization and Structure*. Paper for Conference Dropouts in America: How severe is the problem? What do we know about intervention and prevention? Civil Rights Project. Graduate School of Education. Harvard University.  
[www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/dropouts/lee.pdf](http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/dropouts/lee.pdf)
- Legters, N. & Kerr, K. (2001). *Easing the Transition to High School: An Investigation of Reform Practices to Promote Ninth Grade Success*. Paper presented at the Conference on Dropouts in America: How severe is the problem? What do we know about intervention and prevention? Civil Rights Project. Graduate School of Education. Harvard University.  
<http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/dropouts/legters.pdf>
- Lehr, C.A., Moreau, R.A., Lange, C. & Lanners, E. (2003). *Alternative Education School: Findings from a National Survey of the States. Research Report #2*. . Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota. The College of Education and Human Development.  
[http://ici.umn.edu/alternativeschools/publications/alt\\_schools\\_report2.pdf](http://ici.umn.edu/alternativeschools/publications/alt_schools_report2.pdf)
- Lezotte, L.W. (1991). *Correlates of Effective Schools: The First and Second Generation*. Effective Schools Products, Ltd., Okemos, MI.  
<http://www.effectiveschools.com/freestuff.asp>

## Bibliography

- Lockwood, A.T. & Secada, W.G. (1999). The Hispanic Dropout Problem and Recommendations for Its Solution. In *Transforming Education for Hispanic Youth: Exemplary Practices, Programs, and Schools*. NCBE Resource Collection Series, No. 12. <http://www.ncele.gwu.edu/pubs/resource/hispanicyouth/>
- Lovitt, T.C. (2000). *Preventing School Failure: Tactics for Teaching Adolescents*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.
- Maeroff, G.I. (1996). *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals.
- McKinley, J. (2005). *Effective Teaching Strategies for High Performing African American Students in an Urban District*. Paper presented at American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting in Montreal.
- McPartland, J. & Jordan, W. (2000). *Essential Components of High School Dropout Prevention Reform*. Paper presented at the Conference on Dropouts in America: How severe is the problem? What do we know about intervention and prevention? Civil Rights Project. Graduate School of Education. Harvard University. <http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/dropouts/deluca.pdf>
- Mendes, E. (2003). What Empathy Can Do. *Educational Leadership*. 61(1).
- Murphy, J., Beck, L.G., Crawford, M., Hodges, A., & McGaughy, C.L. (2001). *The Productive High School: Creating Personalized Academic Communities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.
- National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Education Alliance. (2004). *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform*. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals.
- National Research Council Institute of Medicine. (2004). *Engaging Schools: Fostering High School Students' Motivation to Learn*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
- Newmann, F.M. (Ed.) (1992). *Student Engagement and Achievement in American Secondary Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Newmann, F.M., Wehlage, G.G., & Lamborn, S.D. (1992). The Significance and Sources of Student Engagement. In Newmann, F.M. (Ed.). *Student Engagement and Achievement in American Secondary Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Newmann, F.M. & Wehlage, G.G. (1995). *Successful School Restructuring: A Report to the Public and Educators* by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Center for Educational Research. University of Wisconsin.

## Bibliography

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. (1994). *Resilience Research: How Can It Help City Schools?* [http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/cityschl/city1\\_1b.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/cityschl/city1_1b.htm)

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2005). GRADS Career and Technical Education Program.

Padron, Y.N., Waxman, H.C., & Rivera, H.H. (2002). *Educating Hispanic Students: Obstacles and Avenues to Improved Academic Achievement*. Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence. Santa Cruz: University of California.

Quint, J., Bloom, H.S., Black, A.R. & Stephens, L. with Akey, T.M. (2005). *The Challenge of Scaling Up Educational Reform: Findings and Lessons from First Things First*. Final Report. MDRC.

Raywid, M.A. (1999). Current Literature on Small Schools. *ERIC Digest*. ED425049. <http://www.ericdigests.org/1999-3/small.htm>.

Reyes, P., Scribner, J.D., & Scribner, A.P. (Eds.). (1999). *Lessons from High-Performing Hispanic Schools: Creating Learning Communities*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Reyhner, J. (2002). Plans for Dropout Prevention and Special School Support Services for American Indian and Alaska Native Students. *American Indian Education*. <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/INAR.html>

Rimer, S. (2003, June 14). High School is Virtual, but the Caps and Gowns are Real. *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/14/education/14GRAD.html>

Romo, H.D. (1998). Latina High School Leaving: Some Practical Solutions. *ERIC Digest*. ED423096. <http://www.ericdigests.org/1999-2/latina.htm>

Romo, H.D. & Falbo, T. (1996). *Latino High School Graduation. Defying the Odds*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Rumberger, R.W. (2001). *Why Students Drop Out of School and What Can Be Done*. Paper presented at the Conference on Dropouts in America: How severe is the problem? What do we know about intervention and prevention? Civil Rights Project. Graduate School of Education. Harvard University. <http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/dropouts/rumberger.pdf>

Schargel, F.P. & Smink, J. (2001). *Strategies to Help Solve Our School Dropout Problem*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Scherer, M. (2002). Do Students Care About Learning? A Conversation with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. *Educational Leadership*. 61(1).

## Bibliography

- Scribner, A.P. & Scribner, J.D. (2001). High-Performing Schools Serving Mexican American Students: What They Can Teach Us. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools* EDO RC-01-4.  
<http://www.ericdigests.org/2002-3/high.htm>
- Scribner, J.D., Young, M. D. & Pedroza, A. (1999). Building Collaborative Relationships with Parents. In Reyes, P., Scribner, J.D. & Scribner, A.P. (Eds.) *Lessons from High-Performing Hispanic Schools: Creating Learning Communities*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Shannon, G.S. & Bylsma, P. (2002). *Addressing the Achievement Gap: A Challenge for Washington State Educators*. Olympia, WA: OSPI.  
<http://www.k12.wa.us/research/pubdocs/pdf/Achievementgapstudy.pdf>
- Shannon, G.S. & Bylsma, P. (2003). *Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools*. Olympia, WA: OSPI.  
<http://www.k12.wa.us/research/pubdocs/pdf/9charactfor%20SIP.pdf>
- Shannon, G.S. & Bylsma, P. (2003). *Helping Students Finish School. Why Students Drop Out and How to Help Them Graduate*. Olympia, WA: OSPI.  
<http://www.k12.wa.us/research/pubdocs/pdf/dropoutreport2003.pdf>
- Smink, J. & Schargel, F.P. (2004). *Helping Students Graduate. A Strategic Approach to Dropout Prevention*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.
- Smith, G.A. (1991). Program Planning for At-Risk Students. In West, L.L. (Ed.). *Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention of At-Risk Youth*. Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen Publishers, Inc.
- St. Germaine, R. (1995). Drop-Out Rates Among American Indian and Alaska Native Students: Beyond Cultural Discontinuity. *ERIC Digest*. ED388491.  
<http://www.ericdigests.org/1996-2/indian.html>
- Solomon, R. P. (1989). Dropping Out of Academics: Black Youth and the Sports Subculture in a Cross-National Perspective. In Weis, L., Farrar, E., & Petrie, H.G. (Eds.). *Dropouts from School: Issues, Dilemmas, and Solutions*. Albany: NY: State Univ. of New York Press.
- Stanton-Salazar, R.D. (1997). A Social Capital Framework for Understanding the Socialization of Racial Minority Children and Youths. *Harvard Educational Review*. 67(1).
- Stone, III, J.R. (2004). Career and Technical Education: Increasing School Engagement. In Smink, J. & Schargel, F.P. *Helping Students Graduate A Strategic Approach to Dropout Prevention*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

## Bibliography

- Strand, J.A. & Peacock, T.D. (2002). Nurturing Resilience and School Success in American Indian and Alaska Native Students. *ERIC Digest*. EDO-RC-02-11.
- Strong, R., Silver, H., Perini, M., & Tuculescu, G. (2003). Boredom and Its Opposite. *Educational Leadership*. 61(1).
- Thomas, K. (2003, June 12). Accountability for Alternative Learning. *USA Today*.
- U.S. General Accounting Office. (2002). *School Dropouts: Education Could Play a Stronger Role in Identifying and Disseminating Promising Prevention Strategies*. (GAO-02-240).
- U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2005). *No Child Left Behind Act: Education Could Do More to Help States Better Define Graduation Rates and Improve Knowledge about Intervention Strategies*. (GAO-05-879).
- Waxman, H.C., Gray, J.P., & Padron, Y.N. (2003). *Review of Research on Educational Resilience*. Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence. Santa Cruz, CA: University of California.
- Wehlage, G.G. & Rutter, R.A. (1986). Dropping Out: How Much Do Schools Contribute to the Problem? *Teachers College Record*. 87(3).  
<http://www.tcrecord.org/content.asp?contentid=660>
- Wehlage, G.G., Rutter, R.A., Smith, G.A., Lesko, H., & Fernandez, R.R. (1989). *Reducing the Risk: Schools as Communities of Support*. New York, NY: The Falmer Press.
- West, L.L. (Ed.). (1991). Introduction. In *Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention of At-Risk Youth*. Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen Publishers, Inc.
- Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (1998). *Understanding by Design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Wolk, R.A. (2005). It's Kind of Different: Student Experiences in Two Early College High Schools. Jobs for the Future. [www.earlycolleges.org](http://www.earlycolleges.org)
- Woods, E.G. (1995). *Reducing the Dropout Rate*. School Improvement Research Series. Research You Can Use. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.  
<http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/9/c017.html>



## APPENDIX A

### PROFILES OF SELECTED DROPOUT PREVENTION AND RECOVERY ACTIVITIES

Many dropout prevention and recovery programs are already being implemented around the state. This appendix provides a brief overview of eight approaches being taken to show the variety of intervention initiatives that are underway. Many other schools and districts are undertaking intervention efforts, but time and space do not permit highlighting all of them.

The eight profiles of dropout prevention programs and practices described in this appendix were deemed to be “promising” by various educators. While there was insufficient time to formally evaluate each of these programs, they all reflect the characteristics and strategies of “successful” approaches. Specifically, they provide enhanced support and services, both academic and personal, that help increase student sense of belonging and student engagement in school, which in turn help students stay in school and graduate. The profiles provide examples of

- Added instructional support, particularly in reading and mathematics.
- Extended learning opportunities, such as double-class periods or block schedules, before and after school, Saturday, or summer school.
- Credit recovery opportunities to encourage and permit students to make up partial or full credit for failed course work.
- Personal attention, support, and guidance through advisories or mentors.
- Creating smaller learning environments through academies or other organizational structures.
- Outreach to family and community.
- Aggressive recruitment of students back into school through home visits or personal contacts at teens’ work places, e.g. McDonalds, and so on.
- Transitional support for ninth grade students and others new to the school.
- Provision of “wrap around” resources and support to help students meet social, health, and personal needs. Examples may include direct assistance (e.g. bus passes) or hands-on support in connecting with community resources (e.g. referrals for health care or housing).
- Separate alternative schools or re-entry programs.
- Increased flexibility to encourage students’ returning to school, such as more frequent entry dates for school enrollment.
- Development or revision of policies for discipline and attendance to encourage students to succeed in school.

The approaches and the eight schools and district implementing them are as follows:

1. School-wide comprehensive improvement using Coalition of Essential Schools – Nathan Hale High School, Seattle School District.
2. Advisory and school improvement – Granger High School, Granger School District.

3. School-wide comprehensive guidance – Franklin Pierce School District (Tacoma).
4. Ninth-grade transition using peer mentoring and tutoring – Burlington-Edison High School, Burlington-Edison School District.
5. Credit recapture – Auburn Riverside High School, Auburn School District.
6. Retrieval and intervention support – New Market Vocational Skills Center, Tumwater School District.
7. Alternative high school – AIM High School, Snohomish School District.
8. Dropout prevention practices – Edmonds School District.

Each profile begins with general school description, including school size, location, student characteristics, and dropout and graduation rates. The dropout prevention strategy and its features are then described. Evidence of the effectiveness of the strategy and contact information are also provided.

There is no guarantee that schools that undertake these activities will replicate the results. To maximize the chances for success, educators and policymakers need to assess their local context and decide which approach makes the most sense, then ensure a high quality of implementation. Making contact with staff may reveal lessons learned in the implementation process. Ultimately, success will depend on a strong and sustained adult commitment to reduce the dropout rate, adequate allocation of resources, and a program's attention to relationship building and instructional strategies that reinforce student sense of belonging and engagement.

\* \* \* \* \*

The following sources were used when preparing selected summaries in this appendix.

- Boeing Honors High School with Grant for Excellence. (2004). *The Seattle Times*.
- Nathan Hale High School 2004 Annual Report and *Nathan Hale's Academies and Integrated Studies Programs: Inclusion, Collaboration, and Personalization* (presentation materials) <http://hale.seattleschools.org>
- *Nathan Hale High School Creates A More Personal Place for Kids* (2002). Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory <http://www.nwrel.org/nwedu/2002f/t-win.html>
- Center for Educational Effectiveness, Inc. 2005 Data Analysis. Granger High School
- The Achievement Alliance 2005. "Se Puede" It Can Be Done. Granger High School Washington. [www.achievementalliance.org](http://www.achievementalliance.org)
- OSPI. (2004). *Navigation 101: How a Focus on Planning Skills Leads to Higher Student Performance*.
- Cohen, C. & Patterson, D. (2005). *Student Adventures in Learning (SAIL) Program*. Edmonds School District. Evaluation Report.



## 1. School Improvement and Academies Nathan Hale High School

**SCHOOL DESCRIPTION.** Nathan Hale High School is a comprehensive high school serving grades 9-12 in Seattle Public Schools. Its October 2004 enrollment was 1,076 students. In that school year, its students were 3 percent American Indian, 17 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 10 percent African American, 9 percent Hispanic, and 61 percent white. About 17 percent are eligible for a free or reduced-priced lunch, 12 percent were in special education, and 5 percent were English language learners. The on-time graduation rate for the Class of 2004 was 83 percent, and its annual dropout rate in 2003–04 was less than 2 percent. The vision of the school is “to ensure that ALL students will become honorable, thinking, skillful citizens.” Nathan Hale set out to increase personalization of its learning environment to foster student achievement, committing to those students who have historically been unsuccessful in school. In the last 15 years, it has reconstituted itself from a “thug” school with a bad reputation into an effective sought-after school.

**DROPOUT PREVENTION STRATEGY.** Nathan Hale High School has been a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools since 1997. Teachers reviewed their school’s data, programs, and practices and determined the school needed changes that resulted in joining the Coalition of Essential Schools, which provides a reform framework and assistance. The teachers identified four descriptors for their five-year vision: collaborative, personal relationships, integrated curriculum, and inclusive and equitable. The school began making changes to achieve the vision. The school organizational structure now includes ninth grade academies, tenth grade integrated studies, and eleventh and twelfth grade American Studies program. All aspects of the school improvement effort are important to the school’s successes with students.

In an effort to reach each student personally, the Ninth Grade Academy was formed in 1998. In 2004, 270 students and 15 staff were organized into three academies, with smaller class ratios of 25 to 1. Ninth graders take five classes instead of six. Each Academy is a cross section of the student population: the academies are inclusive, balanced for race, gender, special education students, English as Second Language learners, and achievement levels. The academies are made up of language arts, social studies, physical science and health teachers. Opportunities in the Academy include support classes for special education and English language learners, honors credit option within the classes, differentiated curriculum, and high expectations for all. The Academy is organized into 90-minute periods daily. All teachers instruct the same lesson and student progress is closely monitored. Teachers are organized into interdisciplinary and intra-disciplinary teams. An IEP consulting teacher, a counselor, and an administrator are assigned to the ninth grade.

The tenth grade Integrated Studies Program began in 1999. Students from the ninth grade academies loop together. The tenth grade program includes approximately 270 students and 13 staff with nine general education teachers, one IEP consulting teacher, one teacher for English Language Learners, two aides, and one counselor. The teams are organized with 90

students and three core teachers for language arts, biology, and social studies. The program has high expectations for all students, provides honors credit options within classes, and provides support classes for special education and ELL students. Inclusive features include differentiated curriculum, project-based curriculum, logbooks for all classes, and inter-disciplinary and intra-disciplinary teams.

The eleventh and twelfth grade American Studies Program includes the inclusive features implemented in the other academies. Staff decided to loop in a two-year program with students learning language arts and social studies. Students currently take courses that focus on social justice: one full year of United States history and literature, one year of American government and one year of language arts of their choice. Opportunities in these programs include completion of a culminating project and honors and Advanced Placement options within classes.

Nathan Hale has raised standards and provided support to help students meet them. These program changes include increased graduation requirements, twice weekly mentorship for all students, moving to a culminating project from a senior project, collaboration time for teachers, an after-school homework center and tutoring program, and an emphasis on differentiated curriculum. Other changes that have been instituted to improve student learning include starting school later in response to adolescent sleep patterns, providing a daily 30-minute, all-school sustained silent reading period, and requiring students to complete 60 hours of service learning by graduation. Another unique feature of the school is a nationally recognized radio station KNHC 89.5 that reaches the greater Puget Sound area. An important component of the improvement effort is professional development. About 90 percent of the staff members participate in Critical Friends Groups to improve instruction and their own professional growth.

### **EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS**

- Annual dropout rate declined from 12 percent to less than 2 between 2002 and 2004.
- On-time graduation rate for the Classes of 2002–2004 ranged from 80-83%.
- Suspensions and expulsions have declined from 2002 to 2004.
- The school leads the district in reading scores on state assessments for students of color.
- High correlation between Hale GPA and University of Washington GPA.
- 70 percent of 2004 graduates enrolled in college.
- 56 percent of the 10<sup>th</sup> graders met the WASL standards in reading, math, and writing.
- Visitors to the school report seeing:
  - High numbers of engaged students
  - Assignments and activities are rigorous, relevant, focused, and accessible to all students
  - School has culture of respect rather than culture of punitive disciplinary measures
  - Teachers are willing to examine their own practice.
- Received the John D. Warner Excellence in Education Award from The Boeing Co. and a \$25,000 grant in 2004.

**CONTACT:** Lisa Hechtman, Principal 206-252-3680 [Lahechtman@seattleschools.org](mailto:Lahechtman@seattleschools.org)

## 2. Advisories and School Improvement Granger High School

**SCHOOL DESCRIPTION.** Granger High School is a comprehensive high school serving grades 9-12 in the Granger School District in Yakima Valley. Its October 2004 enrollment was 300 students. In that school year, its students were 81 percent Hispanic, 12 percent white, and about 6 percent American Indian. About 84 percent are eligible for a free or reduced-priced lunch, 7 percent were in special education, 20 percent were English language learners, and 28 percent were migrant students. The on-time graduation rate for the Class of 2004 was 77 percent, and its annual dropout rate in 2003-2004 was 1 percent. Most of the families in Granger are permanent agricultural workers who have settled in the area; about one third are children of migrant agricultural workers. In the early years of the decade, the schools' performance indicators were low: Tests scores were low, annual dropout rates were relatively high, student behavior was often troublesome. Student achievement on the WASL has been increasing over the past few years. Student attendance and behavior have improved.

**DROPOUT PREVENTION STRATEGY.** The high school is noted for its strong advisory program. Establishing advisories was an important organizational change. Advisory periods are the primary means for connecting students with the school, and advisors provide a communications link between school and families. Every professional staff member is assigned a group of 18-20 students. Advisories are organized by student reading levels so that each teacher has students across the spectrum from struggling readers to high performers. Advisories meet four days a week for 30 minutes at the end of the school day. Advisors monitor student work and serve as liaisons with the students' teachers, administration, and parents. Advisors meet with students, help with developing their schedule of classes and help them catch up when they are struggling. Each semester advisors meet individually with the student and parents or guardians in student-led conferences. The conferences include what they are learning, what they need to graduate, their reading levels, grades, what interventions are needed, and plans for after high school. The school reports that five times in a row the participation rate for conferences has been 100 percent.

In 2004-2005 Granger instituted a no failing rule. Students who fall below a C in their school work are required to improve the grade. Students receive additional help. The advisory teachers provide the communication link with parents. Students may retake tests and quizzes until they get a C or better. Granger cut the number of failing grades by half compared to the previous year.

The school has also implemented strategies that have improved the school environment and increased student achievement. Instructional and organizational changes include an intensive reading program called "Second Shot Reading," more opportunities for failing students to succeed, requiring math WASL-like problems twice a week, changes in disciplinary expectations such as prohibiting gang-related clothing or activities and student

accountability for attendance, home visitations, and raised expectations for both teachers and students.

Another important aspect of the improvement effort is added social and personal support provided to students to help them stay on track to graduate. One component of the school improvement program is funded by a Safe Schools Healthy Students federal grant. This grant provides resources for a social worker, a case manager, and a therapist who work with families. The case manager provides liaison between the schools and the police department, coordinates nursing and medical services for pregnant girls and new mothers, and contacts and communicates with parents and families.

### **EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS**

- Academic achievement on the 10<sup>th</sup> grade WASL has improved dramatically over the past 5 years; in 2005
  - 61 percent of students met standard in reading, compared to 20 percent in 2001
  - 31 percent met state math standards, compared to 4 percent in 2001
  - 51 percent met state writing standards, compared to 11 percent in 2001.
- The on-time graduation rate for the Class of 2004 was 77 percent (the state's rate was 70 percent) and the previous class rate was 59 percent; many students stay in school and graduate late rather than drop out before finishing.
- According to a survey conducted by Center for Educational Effectiveness, teacher belief in students' ability to meet the state learning standards has increased from 50 percent in 2000 to 75 percent in 2005.

**CONTACT:** Richard Esparza, Principal 509-854-1115 [esparza@gsd.wednet.edu](mailto:esparza@gsd.wednet.edu)

### 3. School-wide Comprehensive Guidance Franklin Pierce School District

**SCHOOL DESCRIPTION.** Franklin Pierce School District is located near Tacoma. It has two comprehensive traditional high schools and three alternative high schools/middle schools. District enrollment in October 2004 was 7,862 students. In that school year, its students were 60 percent white, 15 percent African American, 13 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 9 percent Hispanic, and 3 percent American Indian. About 49 percent are eligible for a free or reduced-priced lunch. The estimated cohort graduation rate for the Class of 2004 was 56 percent, and its annual dropout rate in 2003-2004 was 7 percent. The district first implemented a school-wide comprehensive guidance program at the high school level. The program was expanded to include grades 6-12 with pilots being initiated for grades 3-5.

**DROPOUT PREVENTION STRATEGY.** The Franklin Pierce model of school-wide comprehensive guidance was developed to help students understand the school system and learn to plan and obtain the knowledge and skills they need to complete high school successfully and to be prepared for and complete post-secondary education or more training leading to family-wage jobs. The responsibility for providing a guidance curriculum on this scale became the responsibility of the entire school staff. All teachers were trained to teach the content of the guidance curriculum. Each teacher, who serves as a personal advisor, leads a class of about 20 students and remains with the same students over their four-year career. The teachers are called “*Navigation*” teachers.

The guidance classes meet twice a month to discuss course selection, plan for post-secondary goals, and make connections for internships, job shadowing, community service and other career-related experiences. Regular student-led parent-teacher conferences are held annually in the spring at the high schools and semi-annually at the middle schools. Students share their progress and plans. They show their work and discuss their accomplishments, what they learned, and what was difficult for them. Following the review of the past year, the conferences focus on planning for the coming year. At the end of the conference, all participants sign the plan for courses for the next year.

The content of the guidance curriculum includes

- “discussion and analysis of students’ test results
- various assessments of personal interests and aptitudes
- goal-setting skill development
- development of the Student Learning Plan
- planning for each year’s high school course selection and personal goals
- independent living skills lessons, such as how to budget and how to balance a checkbook
- information about how the post-secondary education and training system works and how to access it
- development of a student portfolio and planning for annual, student-led planning conferences with their parents or guardians and their Navigation teacher” (p. 10).

**EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS**

- Students choose more challenging academic courses; requests for enrollment in chemistry, physics and pre-calculus have steadily increased over the past few years.
- Parents, teachers, and counselors have new roles; the percentage of students represented by at least one adult at student-led conferences has increased in both high schools.
- Student/parent satisfaction surveys demonstrate strong support for the program.

**CONTACT:** Tim Stensager, Executive Director, Technical/Career Education  
253-537-0211, ext. 6229 [Tim\\_Stensager@fp.k12.wa.us](mailto:Tim_Stensager@fp.k12.wa.us)

## 4. Peer Mentoring and Tutoring Burlington-Edison High School

**SCHOOL DESCRIPTION.** Burlington-Edison High School is a comprehensive high school serving grades 9-12. Its October 2004 enrollment was 1,100 students. In that school year, its students were 81 percent white, 15 percent Hispanic, 3 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian and African American students were 1 percent each. About 21 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, 10 percent were in special education, and 6 percent were English language learners. The migrant population was about 3 percent. The on-time graduation rate for the Class of 2004 was 79 percent, and its annual dropout rate in 2003-2004 was 5 percent.

On the 2005 WASL, 81 percent met the standard in reading, 64 percent in math, 68 percent in writing, and 50 percent in science; 55 percent met the standard in three areas: reading, math, and writing. About half of the graduating students go to college (25 percent to a 4-year college and 25 percent go to a community college or technical school).

**DROPOUT PREVENTION STRATEGIES.** An advisory program is now in the eighth year at Burlington-Edison. In the PAWS program (Portfolio of Academic and Work Skills), students ultimately produce a portfolio which is presented to a community panel as the culminating project. Students are grouped heterogeneously within their cohort group and remain with the same group and advisor for the entire four years of high school. The advisor assists with scheduling, counseling, assessment, pathway selection, developing a fifth year plan, and the developing of the portfolio throughout the four years. The advisor becomes an advocate for the student as well as their guidance counselor. Advisory period occurs every Wednesday (when the school is not on a special schedule for late arrival or assemblies). Lessons are created by the career counselor and assistant principal for each grade level. Teachers receive the lesson plan and materials a couple days prior to the advisory period. Activities include:

- Review, select, and evaluate 8 educational samples per year
- 4 samples indicating a students' citizenship and/or volunteerism per year
- 4 Personal samples indicating a student's interests outside of school, e.g. hobbies, accomplishments, and other extra-curricular activities per year
- Junior Job Shadow
- Annual goal assessment
- PAWS & Reflecting: submitting samples and filling out paperwork
- Prepare the presentation of the Culminating Project, which is the presentation of the portfolio to a community panel
- Multiple aptitude and interest surveys including: Colors, Discovery Wheel, ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery), Pathways, Multiple Intelligences, Learning Style inventories, etc.
- Satisfying Harassment, Bullying, HIV/AIDS presentation requirements
- 5<sup>th</sup> year plan.

The Mentorship Program, now in its fourth year, matches older students with 9<sup>th</sup> grade students as mentors. All 9<sup>th</sup> graders have a student mentor. The 10<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> graders adopt 3-4 9<sup>th</sup> graders and work with them from Freshman Orientation throughout the year. Bi-monthly meetings are established to provide an opportunity for “guided” discussions within the PAWS curriculum. Topics include goal-setting, coping strategies, school traditions, Drug and Alcohol awareness, relationships, study skills, and PAWS and Reflecting. Mentors are also encouraged to meet with their students informally on a weekly basis. Curriculum ideas are created by the mentors, presentations are created by students, and topics are taught by students. This program is “owned” by the students.

The Tiger Success Academy is a new prevention program, instituted in summer 2005. In this program, incoming 9<sup>th</sup> graders are invited to participate in a proactive summer school program which exposes them to the operations of the high school, Math and English instruction, strategies for success, and a chance to get to know student leaders and staff. As this is the first year of the program, effectiveness cannot be measured at this time. Twenty-five students completed the program in 2005. Students are invited based on a recommendation by their 8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers and principals, their 7<sup>th</sup> grade WASL scores, and as part of a Student Learning Plan intervention.

#### **EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS**

- September enrollment in 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade has increased in each of the past three years.
- More students have increased their grade point average (GPA) since implementation of the advisory and mentorship programs.
- From 2001-2002 to 2004-2005, students achieving at least a 3.0 GPA increased from 37 percent to 51 percent of all students enrolled.
- Fewer students have performed poorly, according to GPA, in the years since implementation of the advisory and mentorship programs: from the first semester of 2001-2002 to the first semester of 2004-2005, students achieving a GPA of 1.0 or below decreased from 20 percent to 11 percent.

**CONTACT:** Mike Curl, Assistant Principal, 360-757-4074 x3509 [mcurl@be.wednet.edu](mailto:mcurl@be.wednet.edu)



## **5. Credit Recapture Program Auburn Riverside High School**

**SCHOOL DESCRIPTION.** Auburn Riverside High School is a comprehensive high school serving grades 9-12 in Auburn School District. Its October 2004 enrollment was 1,888 students. In that school year, its students were 78 percent white, 8 percent Hispanic, 8 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 4 percent African American, and 2 percent American Indian. About 20 percent are eligible for a free or reduced-priced lunch, 7 percent were in special education, and 3 percent were English language learners. The on-time graduation rate for the Class of 2004 was 82 percent, and its annual dropout rate in 2003-2004 was 2 percent.

**DROPOUT PREVENTION STRATEGY.** Auburn Riverside implemented a credit recapture program about six years ago. The program offers students an opportunity, as well as the instructional and personal support, to recapture course credit in language arts and social studies when they begin to falter and get off track. The English department chair has coordinated the program primarily as an after-school program. A social studies teacher also provides students the opportunity to recapture social studies credit. The qualities of the staff are important to the successful implementation of the program. Strong, consistent coordination and instruction are essential. The team of teachers has strong content backgrounds and work well with other teachers. They also are patient, caring, and persistent in developing positive relationships with students.

Students who fail at the semester are identified by counselors or teacher referral, or lists of grades, and offered the opportunity to regain the credits through a contract that stipulates the work they must do. Students receive credit and exit the program when they fulfill the requirements of the contract. The contracts differ according to the degree students fail. For example, students who miss passing by a relatively small margin are required to do different work than students who fail by a greater margin. Students complete work at “mastery level” but can progress at their own pace. The work aligns with the state Grade Level Expectations. The teachers also provide assistance with the students’ current courses to help prevent future failures.

The program meets for two hours after school three days a week, Monday through Wednesday. A fourth day was cut due to budget reductions. Students who need a few credits are permitted to make up courses on contract with the coordinator after their class graduates. These students may be in school all day working on their contracted assignments. The teacher meets with them as time permits during regular scheduled classes.

The content for language arts includes book study, writing assignments, and related work. Students also practice “WASL-ettes” with stem questions and articles for reading and writing.

Students may raise their grade from failing to a passing grade of C and receive credit for the course. The F remains on the transcript along with the new C grade. However, the F is not computed into the student's grade point average.

Other credit recapture opportunities are provided during the summer in mathematics and science. Additional strategies include a study skills class for students who are studying hard and need added support. A competency mathematics class is provided to give students who are struggling in algebra a second period of support. Students give up an elective to take the competency math class in order to get support and recapture credit if they fail a semester class.

### **EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS**

- 157 semester credits were recaptured by Auburn Riverside students in 2004-05.

**CONTACT:** Geri Rohlf, Language Arts Department Chair and program coordinator  
253-804-5154 [grohlf@auburn.wednet.edu](mailto:grohlf@auburn.wednet.edu)

Dave Halford, Assistant Principal 253-804-5154  
[dhalford@auburn.wednet.edu](mailto:dhalford@auburn.wednet.edu)

## **6. Alternative High School AIM High School**

**SCHOOL DESCRIPTION.** AIM (Alternative Instructional Methods) High School is an alternative school of choice serving grades 9-12 in the Snohomish School District. Its October 2004 enrollment was 71 students. In that school year, its students were 89 percent white, 4 percent American Indian, 3 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 3 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent African American. About 22 percent are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, and 13 percent were in special education. The on-time graduation rate for the Class of 2004 was 19 percent, and when counting students who finish after a four-year period, the graduation rate was 42 percent. Its annual dropout rate was 10 percent.

**DROPOUT PREVENTION STRATEGY.** AIM High School is similar to many alternative schools in the state. According to its mission statement, it “offers a quality, contract-based academic program within a respectful, supportive, intimate environment. Through partnerships between our students, staff, parents, and community, we seek to promote the intellectual growth, personal development, and social responsibility of all our students.”

The school was created 20 years ago to serve students in grades 9-12 from ages 14 to 20. The school offers a regular high school diploma. The school is a choice alternative so students complete an application and interview, along with a parent or significant adult, as part of the enrollment process. Students generally have earned some credits before they enroll. If they have no experience in working independently at their own pace, students enroll in the credit retrieval program first. Students who enroll in AIM tend to remain until they graduate in two to four years. However, some may work toward an adult diploma (which requires 19 credits) or occasionally leave to get the General Education Development (GED) certificate.

Four certificated teachers, two who have certification in special education and two who have administrative credentials, work with the students. The staff also includes a part-time counselor, a part time administrator, and three support staff. The coursework is self-paced and primarily taught in a one-to-one situation. Several classes also meet in seminars once a week. Work must be completed with an 80 percent accuracy rate; students may correct work until it is mastered. Students have the opportunity to make up failed work in modified courses if at least 50 percent of the work has been completed. Students can participate in Running Start, the regional skill center, and classes and/or athletics at the regular high school. Students are required to follow the rules and regulations of the school district. The school offers three program options: morning, afternoon, and evening sessions. A once-a-week afternoon session provides an opportunity for make up and extra help.

**EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS**

- Graduated 13 students in 2005
- A consistent waiting list of approximately 10 students
- Few behavioral referrals or suspensions
- Parent Group meets monthly. Parent Group is in the fourth year and is growing.
- Active Associated Student Body leadership group

**CONTACT:** June Shirey, Administrator 360-563-7289 [june\\_shirey@sno.wednet.edu](mailto:june_shirey@sno.wednet.edu)

## **7. Dropout Retrieval and Intervention Support New Market Vocational Skills Center**

**SCHOOL DESCRIPTION.** New Market Vocational Skills Center (NMVSC), located in Tumwater School District, serves students in grades 11-12 from 25 high schools in ten school districts in Thurston, Mason, and Lewis Counties. Its 2004 enrollment was approximately 800 students. Most of the students attend the skills center for one-half day and spend the other portion of the school day in their home high schools. Approximately 125 students attend the skills center full time. (Other demographic information is not collected because students are counted in their home schools.)

**DROPOUT PREVENTION STRATEGY.** NMVSC received a Workforce Development Council Grant as part of the WIA Statewide Dropout Prevention and Intervention Program. The program is a partnership between the Pacific Mountain Workforce Development Council, Educational Service District 113 and skills center. The project was launched in March 2005 after the grant was awarded.

The goal of the project is “bringing kids back” and helping them complete programs and graduate. To date 50 students have enrolled at New Market as part of the program. Recruitment is largely by word of mouth and through some assertive “outreach,” such as finding students at their workplace. The grant funds were used to hire an intervention specialist for the school. The school has a social worker funded as a regular staff member. The intervention specialist and social worker develop personal and persistent relationships with students and then connect students with community resources that may include housing, medical, or childcare. The additional enrollment generates enough basic education dollars to fund extra teaching staff. “The Barrier Reduction Funds” provided by the legislature to vocational skills centers for extended day programs are used to help provide “wrap around” services students may need. New Market uses the funds to help students with transportation, “co-pays” for childcare, food, and other allowable personal and school needs.

The core component of the program is providing personal contact, guidance, and assistance to each student in the program. The support team of the intervention specialist and social worker do a “lot of handholding” and make frequent one-to-one contacts with the students and often with their families. They are a liaison between teachers and students and they facilitate and communicate to help students negotiate the school day and class work. The students are generally full-day students at New Market and participate in the career technical education program for half the day and take an academic program the other half, either through regular classes or over the NovaNet online system.

Students report they find the school environment positive and welcoming. They like the hands-on curriculum and feel there is more interaction between teachers and students. Teachers respond on a personal level. The intervention specialist and social worker make almost daily contacts and follow up with students. If students get behind, someone will

check with them. Students can make up credits. One student captured the essence of the program by saying, “Here everyone wants you to learn.”

The school social worker noted that when students are having problems in school or dropout, they have “something they need to take care of before they can come back.” A lack of housing, energy assistance, gas, meals, basic health or Medicaid, food services, appropriate clothes for internships, or bus passes are examples of potential barriers for students. The social worker helps students access the services they need. The intervention specialist and social worker are a team that provides immediate assistance when something needs attention.

Other features of the program include a low teaching ratio of 15 to 1 or 20 to 1. Students receive customized curriculum through use of Internet programs that allow teachers to help them fill the “holes” in their learning. Students do not have to wait until a new semester begins to enroll in school and begin classes. Students can enter weekly; orientations are every Friday. Through competency-based programs, students can increase the credits they earn in a year. In addition, students may make up lost credits through summer school. Students are allowed to earn a half credit for 90 hours of instruction through a three-week session. Two sessions in the summer, for a total of six weeks, allow students to potentially earn a full credit.

#### **EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS**

- As of October 2005, 50 students had been “found” and recruited back into school.

**CONTACT:** John Aultman, Executive Director 360-570-4500 [jaultman@nmvsc.com](mailto:jaultman@nmvsc.com)

## **8. Dropout Strategies and Credit Retrieval Edmonds School District**

**SCHOOL DESCRIPTION.** Edmonds School District had an October 2004 enrollment of 21,115 students. At that time, its students were 71 percent white, 14 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 8 percent Hispanic, 6 percent African American, and 2 percent American Indian. About 26 percent are eligible for free or reduced price meals, 14 percent were in special education, and 8 percent were English language learners. The district's on-time graduation rate for the Class of 2004 was 63 percent, and its annual dropout rate in 2003-2004 was 6 percent.

**DROPOUT PREVENTION STRATEGY.** Edmonds School District has implemented several strategies for reducing and preventing school dropouts. Student Adventures in Learning (SAIL) has existed for more than 15 years in the district through various grants, but its funding is ending at the conclusion of the 2005-2006 school year. A district Dropout Prevention Committee has established a long term goal to "examine the unintended consequences of our policies and procedures and to review our program and personnel practices to ensure all students graduate on time." Other prevention strategies, related to the work of the committee, are in the early stages of implementation throughout the district.

Student Adventures in Learning (SAIL) The district has operated a locally designed dropout prevention program for more than 15 years in one form or another. The Student Adventures in Learning (SAIL) has been funded by different grants such as Job Training Partnership Act, Workforce Investment Act, and the federal Department of Education Dropout Prevention program. The program identifies high risk students upon entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The funds are used for "wrap around" services as the students participate in the regular high school program. These services are provided by specialists at each high school who serve as case managers for 35 to 40 students each. The case managers meet with the students regularly, provide or obtain tutoring, and communicate with parents and Department of Social and Health Services case managers. In addition, students are provided help in preparation for the WASL.

A unique feature of the program is a six-week summer program where students work half a day and attend school half a day. The grant provides minimum wages for the students who are working in a variety of private-sector and public-sector work settings. During the second half of the day, students attend class and "recoup" credits or develop their academic skills.

Breakfast/Dinner Club District high schools are expanding an opportunity for homework clubs with teacher tutoring in a breakfast/dinner club format. Students meet outside of school time from October to June in groups of six or seven. As they eat a meal or snack, they work on completing their assignments. The teachers coordinate with the regular classroom teachers to determine in advance the missing work. Students are encouraged to work together. Parents are notified of student progress and club meeting dates.

Full and Partial Credit The district has developed a policy for granting partial credit when students complete less than a full semester (or trimester). For example, students who enter in the middle of the semester may earn .25 credit for demonstrating their learning during the remainder of the grading period. Students who enter with less than a quarter remaining may receive partial credit if they complete appropriate learning activities in programs designed to assist students demonstrate their learning.

Focus Groups The district recently formed a Dropout Prevention Committee that is conducting a broad study of issues on dropping out of school. As part of that work, student focus groups were conducted in October 2005 to elicit students' responses on topics such as attendance, transitions, and teacher relationships. The responses will be used as appropriate in the district and schools' efforts to create strategies.

### **EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS (SAIL)**

According to a third party evaluation, SAIL provided several benefits to participants:

- Students reported a strong level of personal attachment to the SAIL specialist and “checked-in” several times during a school day.
- Participants had better academic outcomes than similar students who did not participate.
- Students that participated in the summer programs earned higher grades and more credits than those who did not.
- Students who stayed in the program longer did better than those who were in the program for shorter times.
- The program reduced impediments to school for student participants. It eased the transition from middle to high school and established a caring community.

**CONTACT:** Debora Boeck, Grants Development 425-670-7143  
[boeckd@edmonds.wednet.edu](mailto:boeckd@edmonds.wednet.edu)

Jan Beglau, Student Support and Outreach Programs 425-670-7141  
[beglauj@edmonds.wednet.edu](mailto:beglauj@edmonds.wednet.edu)



## APPENDIX B

### DROPOUT PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION INITIATIVE

The Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, Employment Security Department, and OSPI are working together to address the dropout problem in Washington state through the **Dropout Prevention and Intervention Initiative**. This initiative awarded \$1.34 million in Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds to Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) to plan and deliver dropout prevention and intervention services with schools and community organizations. Basic Education Allocation (BEA) funds support educational services to all youth, and WIA funds support social services to eligible youth. (As of June 2005, the total BEA funds used toward these projects was nearly \$2.2 million.) Combining BEA and WIA funds makes it possible to create programs that offer a range of services. All locally-funded projects use their WIA grants with BEA funds from local partner schools and districts. The size of the WIA funds awarded to WDCs ranges from \$135,796 for the Seattle-King County WDC to \$104,733 for the Benton-Franklin WDC. Funding is based on the WIA youth allocation formula.

The initiative provides local WDCs with the flexibility to structure their programs based on local needs. Dropout prevention and intervention services provided in each locale may include:

- **prevention services** (identification of at-risk students and in-school student and support mechanisms that make it possible for the students to remain in and be successful in school);
- **retrieval services** (rapid response or reentry services that brings a young person back into an educational setting); and/or
- **recovery programs** (coordinated services that help a young person return to school, recover lost credits through seat time or competency testing, and resolve academic, social, or personal issues that inhibit successful learning).

The Initiative has funded 12 projects thus far. They are summarized below.

1. **North Central: Learning Center Plus** Serves 20 youth (all dropouts)

This project builds on existing relationships with Wenatchee, Moses Lake, Brewster, and Okanogan school districts and with Juvenile Justice Services, Community Mental Health, and the Washington Department of Social and Health Services. Students enrolled in the Learning Center Plus project receive an individual evaluation to assess current high school credits, requirements for graduation, and credits toward graduation. The Learning Centers provide a hands-on learning environment, with activities emphasizing life skills training and mentoring.

2. **Eastern Washington Partnerships: Project Drop IN** Serves 24 youth

This project works with Rural Resources Employment and Training and includes Clarkston and Mary Walker school districts. Students receive basic education and

workplace skills and can join a support group to help keep them engaged in school. Project staff receive community training to help gain a better understanding of the challenges that students face while working to earn a high school diploma and enter the workforce. The project puts in place a tracking system to document students' progress toward gaining a high school diploma.

3. **Tri-County: Kittitas Rural Education and Service Training (KREST)**

Serves 30 youth

This project works with the Cle Elum-Roslyn, Easton, and Thorp school districts, and Opportunities Industrialization Center of Washington (a community-based organization). Participating school districts and community service providers refer students to the KREST Center. Early intervention and strategies are designed to interest, motivate, and support the at-risk students. The KREST Center recovers dropout students and helps students complete their education by addressing the issues that cause premature exit from school.

4. **Seattle-King: Improving Educational Access & Achievement for Highline Students**

Serves 27 youth (all at-risk)

This project works with six local communities of the Highline School District in two different programs. King County WorkSource's "YouthSource" program recovers dropout students in their one-stop youth education and employment center. These students receive case management services, including deployment of barrier reduction strategies, to attain their high school diploma and vocational training. The University of Washington Small Schools Project and the Big Picture Company have designed a small high school to enroll ninth graders at risk of dropping out. This school opened in Fall 2005, and students receive an Individualized Learning Plan and participate three days a week in school-based activities and two days a week off-site working in internships.

5. **Spokane Area: The NET—Alternative for Education and Training**

Serves 22 students (all dropouts)

This project continues its work with Educational Service District 101, the Spokane Area Skills Center, and 12 school districts: Central Valley, Cheney, Deer Park, East Valley, Freeman, Liberty, Mead, Medical Lake, Nine Mile Falls, Riverside, Spokane, and West Valley. The NET project gives students an achievement test and one-on-one counseling to develop an Individual Instruction Plan. Students receive classroom instruction, career counseling services, workforce development opportunities, and online course work. Students meeting the motivation requirements for independent coursework are given a donated computer for home use on a long-term loan basis.

6. **Tacoma-Pierce: Multi-District Dropout Prevention**

Serves 333 youth (all at-risk)

This project is working with Bethel and Puyallup school districts. Students work with certified staff at each district to develop an Individualized Success Plan. These plans improve attendance and provide advocacy with teachers, parents, social workers, school administrators, and community programs. School district staff can access a

website providing best practices to prevent and retrieve dropouts and a catalog of available vocational college-based high school programs.

7. **Olympic WDC: Academic Intervention Specialist Project**

Serves 50 youth (15 dropouts, 35 at-risk)

This project received the Workforce Board’s “Promising Practice” Award. The Olympic WDC works with Educational Service District 114 and Northwest Services Council, and includes Bremerton, Port Angeles, South Kitsap, and Chimacum school districts. The project expands the capacity of existing prevention and intervention programs in the community by improving communication and case management services. The Intervention Specialist coordinates a rapid response or reentry plan with school districts.

8. **Snohomish: Supporting Teens At-Risk (STAR)**

Serves 30 youth (1 dropout, 29 at-risk)

This project works with Everett Public Schools and nearly all its secondary schools— Cascade High School, Everett High School, H.M. Jackson High School, Sequoia Alternative High School, Eisenhower Middle School, Gateway Middle School, Heatherwood Middle School, and North Middle School. The project uses a “Three-Prong” approach to increase retention and on-time graduation rates. First, an Intervention Specialist works with students at risk of dropping out of school and their parents to devise an Individualized Graduation Strategy for on-time graduation. Second, students can earn credits through the Online High School. Third, students performing below standards in reading and writing are enrolled in the Literacy Support Class.

9. **Southwest: SW Washington WIA Dropout Prevention & Intervention Program**

Serves 34 youth (12 dropouts, 22 at-risk)

This project works with Educational Service District 112 and Clark County Juvenile Justice to fill service gaps within the Battle Ground, Longview, and Vancouver school districts. Battle Ground schools connect students with advisors to provide a personalized learning environment and ongoing mentoring. Longview targets students moving from 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grades, providing a five-week summer session to develop academic skills and support relationships. Vancouver provides an intensive prevention program for academic support. Students who are WIA-eligible can participate in the Youth Workforce Program through Educational Service District 112.

10. **Benton-Franklin: Drop-In Project** Serves 20 youth

This project works with Career Path Services and the Pasco and Finley school districts. The project provides adult and peer mentoring, high school reentry services, work-based learning and career exploration, leadership development, and referrals to community resources. Career Path Services provides a bilingual teacher for one-to-one and small group tutoring during the school year and for credit retrieval programs during the summer.

11. **Northwest (no project name)** Serves 15 youth (all at-risk)

This project works with Catholic Community Services, Skagit County Youth and Family Services, and the Sedro Woolley and Concrete school districts. Sedro Woolley identifies students by disaggregating data from 7<sup>th</sup> grade WASL scores and ranking students to be served by WASL score. Parents and students participate in the development of a Student Learning Plan, including a service strategy and summer remedial assistance. In Concrete, students identified at risk of suspension work with an Academic Coach and an In-School Suspension Assistant. Concrete also implemented a rapid response reentry program to reach students who dropped out.

12. **Pacific Mountain: Dropout Prevention and Retrieval**

Serves 33 youth (16 dropouts, 17 at-risk)

This project works with New Market Vocational Skills Center (NMVSC), the Community Youth Services Center, Educational Service District 113, and the ten school districts in Thurston, Mason, and Lewis counties served by the skills center. The project serves youth who are credit deficient, have high truancy rates, recidivism within the juvenile justice system, and those reentering the traditional school setting for a second or third time. The program identified a “coach” to help the student gain lost credits and remain motivated until graduation. The project includes additional academic course work, tutoring, and alternative methods to credit retrieval such as NOVA Net.

A preliminary evaluation of the projects was conducted by the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board in fall 2005. The key findings were that (1) the collaborative partnerships established between the WDCs, school districts and the community were essential to project success; (2) flexibility was important to structure the most effective services and activities; (3) WIA income eligibility criteria presented barriers to providing services; and (4) the data collected must be improved to evaluate the outcomes of the initiative more completely. However, some of the positive outcomes observed by WDCs in the short-term included improved school attendance, improved grades, improved reading skills, and more positive attitudes about school. The WDCs also noted that (1) creating the partnerships was important, (2) the WIA Youth Funds provided support services needed by the targeted population, (3) students responded well to staff who they felt cared about them and advocated for them, and (4) the program outcomes exceeded the Councils’ expectations.

For more information about these projects, contact Wes Pruitt, Policy Analyst, 360-586-1652. [wpruitt@wtb.wa.gov](mailto:wpruitt@wtb.wa.gov)