

Research Brief

Getting Students to Graduation and Beyond

Question: With higher expectations for graduation, what are ways to keep students in school and graduate?

Summary of Findings:

To have a 100% graduation rate with students who are prepared for higher education or the work place is certainly a major goal of high schools. This has been strongly reinforced by schools needing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as mandated by No Child Left Behind. In 2004-2005, 27% of America's schools did not make AYP. According to research done by The American Diploma Project, 32% of high school graduates have mastered basic literacy, while only 20% of African Americans and 16% Latinos have done so. Three-fourths of high school graduates attend some sort of post-secondary education program within two years of graduating. 30% of college freshman are in at least one remedial course, 76% are in remedial reading and 63% are in remedial math. 65% of students who take remedial courses in college do not complete a post-secondary degree program (*Creating a high school diploma that counts*). In another study, it was found that students who are continuously excluded from activities by peers, were most likely not to participate in school activities and scored lower on standardized tests than students who were more commonly included. While these statistics are frightening, many schools across the United States have implemented programs that will help their students attain an appropriate level of literacy in the different content areas, do better on standardized tests and other assessments, inspire them to stay in school and graduate, and participate in a post-secondary program.

Throughout the literature there were some common themes expressed that should be considered and implemented prior to establishing specific programs.

- As a district and school, carefully examine data such as previous graduation rates, reasons for drop-outs and examine matches and gaps in the assessment data. Compare how and where the curriculum meets and does not meet the matches and gaps.
- Speak with students about what they think they need in order to stay in school through graduation. Utilize that information as appropriate.
- Staff should be involved in all stages of discussion, development, implementation and evaluation of programs.
- Use evaluation data to inform program decisions.
- Provide on-going staff development on and support for strategies that will help students develop high levels of literacy and thinking strategies in their content.
- Provide mentoring and training for new teachers.
- Establish long and short term goals. Then create a smaller goal and set up a timeline for its implementation and evaluation.

Program ideas

- Counselors: Various uses of counselors were described.
 - The counselors work with students in 8th grade, develop a relationship with them, begin exploring their interests and guiding them into appropriate programs based on their interests and aptitudes.
 - Work with a maximum of 300 students throughout their entire high school career. They would deal with all issues regarding each student from office referrals, to social and emotional issues, to scheduling, to post-secondary guidance.
 - Completion counselor whose job it is to work with individual students to encourage them to complete high school and assist with appropriate research for post-secondary options, including scholarships and loans.
- Los Angeles Unified School District utilizes a 20 hour “boot camp” with specialized training to help students gain the skills they need to pass a course.
- In several states, students serve an internship with someone in a local business to learn about and develop appropriate business and social skills for the work world.
- In Alaska, students who graduate in the top 15% of their class receive free tuition to a college in the University of Alaska’s system.
- In Wisconsin, tuition grants are awarded to students who finish high school with a “B” average and meet other eligibility criteria.
- In several states, the high schools pay the tuition for their students to take college classes at the local community college.
- In South Carolina, the schools have career clusters of study and students select the area they would like to pursue.
- Students take one semester of study and note taking skills that are linked to other courses and spend a second semester exploring career options then doing goal setting and planning for college and a career.
- In some schools, all students are required to complete one college application in their senior year. The school pays for the application fee and submits it.
- In some schools, all students visit at least one college with their high school. Other opportunities to visit additional colleges are available through the high school.
- Summer academies are set up to help students retake a course, gain strength in a subject, or explore an enrichment opportunity.
- Open the library open early in the morning and keep it open until 7 PM where tutoring in math, science, English and writing are available. 8th graders are encouraged to utilize the library. Have college-aged students be the tutors.
- Have high school students tutor younger children.
- Implement a Saturday Credit Club for make-up work and make-up courses.
- Create a Credit Lab that helps students study and take exams for credit as well as finish incomplete work.



- Establish an advisory program that meets twice weekly to explore things such as study skills, peer relationships, self-image, adolescent health issues, time management and safety.

Online Resources:

- Building the future on knowledge
Programs offered at a high school in an East Los Angeles high school are described.
http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/bin.asp?CID=782&DID=52055&DOC=FILE.PDF
- Creating a high school diploma that counts
An extensive report from The American Diploma Project provides graduation statistics, attendance information in higher education institutions and recommendations for stronger requirements are outlined in this article.
[http://www.achieve.org/dstore.nsf/Lookup/Creating%20a%20High%20School%20Diploma%20that%20Counts/\\$file/ADPProject.pdf](http://www.achieve.org/dstore.nsf/Lookup/Creating%20a%20High%20School%20Diploma%20that%20Counts/$file/ADPProject.pdf)
- Committed future
Numerous programs used by a high school with a high migrant population in Texas are described in this article.
http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/bin.asp?CID=782&DID=52050&DOC=FILE.PDF
- Embracing reform
This article describes a program at a high school in Hawaii to help students finish school and be better prepared for college.
http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/bin.asp?CID=782&DID=52048&DOC=FILE.PDF
- For some, hurdles keep diploma out of reach
This is a synopsis of a meeting about reasons why it is important to develop an awareness of what keeps Latinos from attending college.
<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-latino4apr04,1,3144835,print.story?coll=la-headlines-california&ctrack=1&cset=true>
- From good schools to great schools
Ideas on how a good school can become a great school are described in this article.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2004/02/04/21bassett.h23.html>
- Learning to earn: More stringent high school graduation requirements may reduce students' chances of earning a diploma. But higher standards also improve their ability to find a job.
This is an examination of the history of mandatory high school competency testing.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0MJG/is_3_3/ai_104835537
- Most Seniors Pass H.S. Exit Test
An article that describes the pass rate for the California High School Exit Exam and states concerns regarding lower pass rates from minorities.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-exit29mar29,1,956534.story>

- Much better than adequate progress
These are brief descriptions from formerly under performing schools and things they have done in order to make AYP.
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/04/AR2006040400644_pf.html
- Partnerships for success
A program for girls in East Harlem is described.
http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/bin.asp?CID=782&DID=52049&DOC=FILE.PDF
- Rejection slip
A brief description of a study's results about peer rejection and low test scores is given in this article.
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/13/AR2006031301318_pf.html
- RI downplays tests as routes to diploma
Arguments for using a variety of assessments for exiting high schools are provided in this piece.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/04/13/31ri.h24.html>
- Several states making college-prep courses the default curriculum
A description of an academic choice program is given in this article.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/04/20/32collegeprep.h24.html>
- States have more schools falling behind
A very brief article on what it takes to make AYP and names some of the lowest ranking states.
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/28/AR2006032801794_pf.html
- States must beef up diploma demands, study maintains
Reasons for making high school graduation requirements tougher are given in this piece.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2004/02/11/22diploma.h23.html>
- States raise bar for high school diploma
Ways in which some states have raised their graduation requirements are cited in this article.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/06/22/41high.h24.html?print=1>

- States target high schools for change
Numerous ideas from several states about how to keep students in school and graduate are provided in this piece.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2006/02/08/22high.html?querystring=graduation%20expectations>
- Studies show high schools' shortcomings
Support is given for reasons to raise high school graduation expectations.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/02/09/22public.h24.html>
- The power of professional preparation
A description of a school in Fresno, California and its programs, in particular, its literacy component are provided in this piece.
http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/bin.asp?CID=782&DID=52054&DOC=FILE.PDF

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