

PREVENTION STRATEGIES RELATED TO SCHOOL DROPOUT

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Guiding Principles

The National Dropout Prevention Center, the American Youth Policy Forum, and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory each conclude in separate studies that there is no "one size fits all" approach to preventing academic failure and school dropout. Their analysis of effective prevention programs -- those that have demonstrated measurable outcomes in boosting achievement and retention among students at-risk of not obtaining a high school diploma or equivalency certificate -- found that all share most if not all of the following characteristics:

1. Early intervention and long-term support;
2. A caring staff with high expectations for themselves, the program and their students;
3. Personalized attention along with services focusing on each student's unique characteristics and circumstances;
4. Experiential learning and programming to enhance basic academic competencies and social skills;
5. Innovative structure/organization that taps the resources of the broader community to meet the academic and non-academic needs of students.

Evidence-Based Strategies

The National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) at Clemson University identifies 15 strategies that have demonstrated the most positive impact on the dropout rate while having also been implemented successfully at all education levels and environments throughout the nation. The descriptions of model programs under each strategy are taken from the National Dropout Prevention Center's Program Database at www.dropoutprevention.org/programs/.

Early Interventions

1. Family Involvement
Families And Schools Together (FAST) is an 8-week family program for pre-school, elementary and middle school youth, ages 4 through 13, who have been identified by teachers as being at risk for substance abuse, school failure, and juvenile delinquency. FAST provides a multi-family group process structured to build social connections and reduce social isolation between families, youth and school in addition to providing both children and parents with skills and information to enhance protective factors on multiple levels around children. (website: www.wcer.wisc.edu/fast/)



2. Early Childhood Education
Second Step is a classroom-based, social skills program for preschool through junior high students (4 to 14 years old). It is designed to reduce impulsive, high-risk, and aggressive behaviors; and increase children's social-emotional competence and other protective factors. Group discussion, modeling, coaching, and practice are used to increase students' social competence, risk assessment, decision-making ability, self-regulation, and positive goal setting. (website: www.cfchildren.org)
3. Reading/Writing Programs (*early interventions to help low-achieving students strengthen reading and writing skills*)
Soar to Success is a research-based reading intervention program for students in grades 3-8 who are reading significantly below grade level. It is a small-group model that uses motivating literature, reciprocal teaching, and graphic organizers in fast-paced lessons to help students accelerate their reading. (website: www.eduplace.com/intervention/soar/)

Basic Core Strategies

4. Mentoring/Tutoring
The Cincinnati Youth Collaborative Mentoring Program provides positive adult role models for hundreds of young people in Cincinnati. The program recruits, trains, matches, and supports volunteer mentors from the community with students in need of extra support and encouragement. In a 2-year program evaluation, 90% of mentees stayed in school compared to the 40% to 70% district-wide dropout rate. Additionally, mentored students had higher rates of school attendance compared with their non-mentored peers. (website: www.thepowerof1.org/)
5. Service-Learning
The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is a cross-age tutoring program designed to increase the self-esteem and school success of at-risk middle and high school students by placing them in positions of responsibility as tutors of younger elementary school students. Prospective tutors enroll in a special tutoring class where they are paid a minimum wage stipend and work with three elementary students at a time for a total of about four hours per week. The overall goal of the program is to reduce the dropout rate of at-risk students by improving their self-concepts, academic skills, life-skills, and family support. (website: www.idra.org/ccvyp/default.htm)



6. Alternative Schooling
Hamilton-Jefferson Co. Alternative Schools provide academic, vocational, and social adjustment activities and programming to in-school, at-risk youth from K-12, and school dropouts up to the age of 21. Services included 1) a truancy prevention component which provides preventive diagnostic, intervention, and remediative services to K-12 referrals; 2) an optional education component (OEP) that provides credit coursework, as well as limited vocational training, to assist at-risk youth and dropouts (ages 14-21) in completing their elementary and/or secondary education; 3) GED test preparation for students 17-21 years of age.
(website: www.roe25.com/home.htm)

7. Out-of-School Experiences (*after-school and summer enrichment programs*)
The Buddy System Project (Indiana) focuses primarily on the improvement of learning in the fourth and fifth grades. The project uses technology to extend learning beyond the classroom and school day and to increase family involvement in education. Sixty elementary schools and five middle schools participate in the project.
(website: www.Buddyproject.org)

Making the Most of Instruction

8. Professional Development
While not a model program, the National Middle School Association is a professional organization for those involved in middle-level education that provides professional development, journals, books, research, and other valuable information to assist educators on an ongoing basis. (website: www.nmsa.org/)

9. Learning Styles/Multiple Intelligences (*education strategies that teach to multiple intelligences and all learning styles*)
The Key Learning Community (KLC) in Indianapolis, Indiana provided the first multiple intelligences school in the US. KLC utilizes a curriculum developed entirely around Dr. Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's Theory of Flow and intrinsic motivation at the elementary, middle and high school levels. (website: www.ips.k12.in.us/mskey/)

10. Instructional Technologies
Relate for Teen social learning software is designed to improve behavior, school climate, and academic performance. The program addresses 320+ areas, from truancy, school failure, grades, teachers, learning styles, and boredom, to bullying, AIDS, eating disorders, substance abuse, depression, sexual abuse, gun violence and racial conflict. It provides training in seven



key social-emotional skills critical to success in dealing with these problems. A study by Columbia/NYU researchers showed it to increase pro-social behavior, decrease aggression, and reduce remedial summer school referrals by 62% at a New York City Middle School. (website: www.rippleeffects.com)

11. Individualized Instruction

The Accelerated Schools Project began at Stanford University in 1986 as a comprehensive approach to school change, designed to improve schooling for children in "at-risk" situations. Accelerated Schools are learner-centered and encourage students to construct knowledge through exploration and discovery in part through making connections between school activities and their lives outside the classroom. Students, staff and parents collaborate in school governance and planning. (website: www.acceleratedschools.net)

Making the Most of the Wider School Community

12. Systemic Renewal (*ongoing school improvement*)

New American Schools (NAS) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization whose mission is to increase student achievement through comprehensive school improvement strategies. NAS works to develop and support conducive environments at the state, district, and school level necessary for continuous school improvement. NAS provides a broad range of consulting services to public schools. (website: www.naschools.org)

13. Community Collaboration

Communities In Schools, Inc., is a national network of local affiliates that work to connect K-12 students and their families with existing social services in their communities. By addressing unmet social, emotional, and health needs, local CIS affiliates strive to ensure that all children have the opportunity to improve their chances for school and life success. (website: www.cisnet.org)

14. Career Education/Workforce Readiness

The Virginia Beach Technical and Career Education Center combines academic and vocational preparation through a choice of 29 occupational programs each geared to prepare students for entry-level jobs and future advancement. Students who complete programs at the Tech Center have the option to enter the job market directly or to continue their studies at two-year or four-year colleges, community colleges, apprenticeship programs, or professional technical institutions.

(website: www.techcenter.vbcps.k12.va.us/index2.htm)



15. Violence Prevention/Conflict Resolution

Students Against Violence Everywhere (S.A.V.E.) was founded by a group of North Carolina high school students in response to the murder of a friend who tried to break-up a fight. S.A.V.E. chapters now exist across the country with the North Carolina Center for the Prevention of School Violence serving as the program's clearinghouse. Individual chapters are started and run by students who want to promote non-violence within their school and community. S.A.V.E. participants provide education about the effects and consequences of violence, support academic requirements for schools, present skits about violence prevention, and present programs for younger students at-risk for becoming involved in violence. (website: www.ncsu.edu/cpsv/save.htm)

Final note: While the above mentioned strategies have been proven effective in isolation, the National Dropout Prevention Center points out that the most successful programs utilize multiple strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Resources on the Web

Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA

Website address: <http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

National Dropout Prevention Center

Website address: <http://www.dropoutprevention.org>

American Youth Policy Forum

Website address: <http://www.aypf.org>

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