

What Research Tells Us about Effective Dropout Prevention Programs

The What Works Clearinghouse has developed a series of practice guides to provide “*practical recommendations for educators to help them address the everyday challenges they face in their classrooms and schools.*” The *IES Practice Guide on Dropout Prevention*¹ presents six recommendations for reducing dropout rates.

Six Recommended Practices (IES Practice Guide, p. 6)

- **Data Systems** – Utilize data systems that support a realistic diagnosis of the number of students who drop out and that help identify individual students at high risk of dropping out. States, districts and schools should develop comprehensive, longitudinal, student level databases with unique IDs that, at a minimum, include data on student absences, grade retention, and low academic achievement. Data should be reviewed regularly, with a particular emphasis before the transitions to middle school and high school.
- **Adult Advocates** – Assign adult advocates to students at risk of dropping out. Adult advocates should have an appropriate background and low caseloads and be purposefully matched with students. Adequate training and support should be provided for advocates.
- **Academic Support** – Provide academic support and enrichment to improve academic performance. Help students to improve academic performance and reengage in school.
- **Social/Behavior Programs** – Implement programs to improve students’ classroom behavior and social skills. Students should establish attainable academic and behavioral goals and be recognized when they accomplish them. Schools can teach strategies to strengthen problem-solving and decision-making skills, and partner with community-based agencies to provide students with supports to address external factors affecting social and behavioral interactions.
- **Learning Environment** – Personalize the learning environment and instructional process. A personalized learning environment creates a sense of belonging and fosters a school climate where students and teachers get to know one another and can provide academic, social, and behavioral encouragement.
- **Rigorous/Relevant Instruction** – Provide rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning and provide the skills needed to graduate and to serve them after they leave school. Engagement can be increased by providing students with the necessary skills to complete high school and by introducing students to postsecondary options.
 - Increasing student engagement is critical to preventing dropping out. Engagement involves active participation in learning and schoolwork as well as in the social life of school.
 - While dropping out typically occurs during high school, the disengagement process may begin much earlier and include academic, social, and behavioral components.

Importance of Middle School Years (IES Practice Guide, p. 4)

During the middle school years, students’ interest in school and academic skills may begin to lag, so that by the time students transition to high school, students who are at risk of dropping out may need intensive individual support or other supports to re-engage them in the purpose of education.

Key Indicators and Predictors (IES Practice Guide, pp. 4-5, 13)

Researchers have identified key academic, behavioral, and psychological indicators for those most likely to drop out of school. These include low academic achievement; frequent absences; grade retention; disciplinary action, notably suspensions; a lack of interest, effort, and engagement with school-work; as well as a lack of a sense of belonging and identification with the school.

Importance of Professional Development (IES Practice Guide, p. 8)

Initiation of targeted, school-wide, and long-term strategies should include a plan to ensure high-quality implementation of the strategies. High quality implementation of the strategies, individually and as part of a larger, comprehensive plan, will require investments in professional development for staff, not only to promote staff skills but also, where necessary, to change staff behaviors and attitudes.

¹ Dynarski, M., Clarke, L., Cobb, B., Finn, J., Rumberger, R., and Smink, J. (2008). *Dropout Prevention: A Practice Guide* (NCEE 2008–4025). Washington, DC: National Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>.

Dropout Prevention Research Findings and Recommendations Comparative Chart

<p style="text-align: center;">All information in this column is taken from the IES Dropout Prevention Practice Guide¹ Research Findings and Recommendations</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Dual Enrollment Freshman Transition Strategies and Program Components</p>
<p>Data Systems – Utilize data systems that support a realistic diagnosis of the number of students who drop out and that help identify individual students at high risk of dropping out. States, districts and schools should develop comprehensive, longitudinal, student level databases with unique IDs that, at a minimum, include data on student absences, grade retention, and low academic achievement. Data should be reviewed regularly, with a particular emphasis before the transitions to middle school and high school.</p>	<p>Student’s online 10-year plan, created in the 8th or 9th grade, can follow them throughout community college. Classroom instructor’s as well as advisors and counselors will have easy access to each student’s plan which can be used for data-driven advisories, addressing the argument that students are more than their test scores, grades and attendance records. In addition, this personalized data will be used to motivate the students to achieve academically because they will understand the consequences of not giving their education their best effort.</p>
<p>Adult Advocates – Assign adult advocates to students at risk of dropping out. Adult advocates should have an appropriate background and low caseloads and be purposefully matched with students. Adequate training and support should be provided for advocates.</p>	<p>The 10-year plans will be used by all instructors throughout students’ high school and community college tenure for advisory and academic coaching efforts to motivate students to graduate, matriculate, and complete post-secondary education and training.</p> <p>With the online 10-year plan, EVERY educator the student comes in contact with, from their instructors to advisors/counselors can become an advocate. Adults can personalize their work with each student after reviewing their short summary page. Or they can spend more extended time working in-depth with each student on their plans, either with classroom assignments or outside of class time.</p> <p>Extensive training is available through the curriculum provider and the grantee would develop further training, particularly as it relates to community college staff.</p>
<p>Academic Support – Provide academic support and enrichment to improve academic performance. Help students to improve academic performance and reengage in school.</p>	<p>The course material is first and foremost an academically based curriculum repackaged in a thematic format. <i>Career Choices</i> curriculum provides ready-made integration of academic skills through the English anthology, <i>Possibilities</i> and the math enhancement, <i>Lifestyle Math</i>.</p> <p>Many schools have integrated it into English/Language arts of which it meets CA State standards. For the DEFT effort the course will provide “double dosing” opportunity for the vital academic skills of reading, writing and computation.</p> <p><i>The Course Standards for Freshman Transition Classes outline key/critical benchmarks for re-engaging students at risk of dropping out and, of equal importance, provide a preemptive intervention at a critical transition in order to prevent student disengagement.</i></p>
<p>Social/Behavior Programs – Implement programs to improve students’ classroom behavior and social skills. Students should establish attainable academic and behavioral goals and be recognized when they accomplish them. Schools can teach strategies to strengthen problem-solving and decision-making skills, and partner with community-based agencies to provide students with supports to address external factors affecting social and behavioral interactions.</p>	<p>The course curriculum is driven by self-reflection, group discussion, and interaction with appropriate adult role models, along the lines of a college. The <i>Instructor’s Guide</i> provides guidance on implementing the materials in an interactive, dynamic learning environment with an emphasis on respecting the opinions and choices of others.</p> <p>The activities outlined and the activity extensions suggested in the <i>Instructor’s Guide</i> provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case Study model using real-world problem-solving activities • Practice with personal and career planning and decision-making skills used by undergraduates • Project-based learning and opportunities for authentic assessment • Career shadowing and internship opportunities

<p>Learning Environment – Personalize the learning environment and instructional process. A personalized learning environment creates a sense of belonging and fosters a school climate where students and teachers get to know one another and can provide academic, social, and behavioral encouragement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for community support and involvement <p>The curriculum chosen mandates a personalized learning environment. The overarching theme is personalized at its very core: <i>Who am I? What do I want? How do I get what I want?</i> Presented in a the Socratic method of teaching, common in college, the focus on individual choices results in a more personalized level of instruction by the instructor.</p> <p>The focus on topics related to the consolidation of each student’s identity, combined with the focus on group discussion and small group work, provides students with a sense of belonging.</p> <p>The resulting 10-year plans are then updated in each of their academic classes in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grade, and used by all instructors for advisory and academic coaching to motivate students to graduate, matriculate, and complete post-secondary education and training.</p> <p>When an individual is “known” at the level the 10-year plan provides this opens up the opportunity for conversations that can lead to the strong teacher/student relationships required for learning.</p>
<p>Rigorous/Relevant Instruction – Provide rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning and provide the skills needed to graduate and to serve them after they leave school. Engagement can be increased by providing students with the necessary skills to complete high school and by introducing students to postsecondary options.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increasing student engagement is critical to preventing dropping out. Engagement involves active participation in learning and schoolwork as well as in the social life of school. ▪ While dropping out typically occurs during high school, the disengagement process may begin much earlier and include academic, social and behavioral components. 	<p>The <i>Career Choices</i> curriculum provides rigorous and relevant instruction about their future—both personal and professional—and about how the choices made today can limit or expand the choices they will have as adults.</p> <p>Incorporation of <i>Possibilities</i> (English) and <i>Lifestyle Math</i> (math) supplements provide a relevant link between the personal theme of <i>Career Choices</i> and the academic subjects students must master.</p> <p>The process of developing an online comprehensive and meaningful 10-year plan that is crafted through contemplation, research, discussion, and trial and error under the tutelage of a high-functioning adult in the form of their classroom teacher requires reflection, observation, deliberation, and scrutiny on the part of the student. As such it is an excellent opportunity for students to practice the higher-order thinking skills prized not only in higher education but in the workplace as well.</p> <p>The process for developing the 10-year plan asks students to research and delineate the post-secondary education or training needed to reach the goals outlined in the plan. And, students who have completed this process are more motivated to graduate from high school and pursue post-secondary education or training because they have a new understanding of the important role that education must play a successful future</p>

1 Dynarski, M., Clarke, L., Cobb, B., Finn, J., Rumberger, R., and Smink, J. (2008). *Dropout Prevention: A Practice Guide* (NCEE 2008–4025). Washington, DC: National Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>.