Reentry Programs for Out-of-School Youth with Disabilities

High school students with disabilities who drop out are costly to society. Compared to those who graduate, they are more likely to be unemployed, dependent on public services, and involved in the criminal justice system. Consequently, helping students with disabilities graduate has become a prominent national concern. Students with disabilities drop out at higher rates than their nondisabled peers and experience more obstacles to reentry. Education providers throughout the country have responded to this situation by offering reentry programs to which students with disabilities can return to complete their high school education. These programs are specifically designed to address students' barriers to school completion and prepare them for college and career readiness. Hence, the NDPC-SD has created the following three reports to help you better understand the issue and to assist you in planning new reentry programs or redesigning existing programs.

The Need for a Broad Range of Options

The variety of reasons that students with disabilities drop out makes it difficult to implement a uniform approach to reentry. Most students with disabilities who drop out are so credit-deficient that returning to the traditional school system to obtain a diploma before they reach the allowable age limit is unrealistic. A growing number of school-college partnerships allow students with disabilities to simultaneously earn high school and college credits. Other reentry options for these students include:

- district alternative schools and charter schools specifically geared toward returning dropouts;
- high schools that integrate on-site job training and enable students to earn credit for work experience;
- adult high schools which students can attend in the evenings to acquire credits toward a high school diploma while co-enrolled in regular high schools;
- adult high schools and adult education programs at which students can apply credits earned for life experience such as employment, skills training certifications, and military training toward a high school diploma;
- adult education centers at which students can complete their high school diploma through self-paced classes, online classes, or by meeting competencies;
- career and technology centers at which students can obtain a GED, then enroll in a career training program and earn credits that transfer to degree programs at local colleges;
- online programs operated by charter schools, adult education providers, community colleges, for-profit organizations, and public school districts through which students can earn high school credits;
- GED programs on college campuses that enable students to obtain GEDs and get support transitioning into postsecondary education;
- collaborative GED/career training programs that enable students to obtain GEDs in addition to occupational skills training.

Strategies for Locating and Reenrolling Students

Many students with disabilities do not realize that they can return to school after dropping out, and those who want to return are often unaware of how to begin the reentry process. It is therefore important to advertise programs and contact youth directly to inform them of their reenrollment options. The most common strategies for locating and reenrolling out-of-school youth include:

- **Phone calls and text messages.** District and school teams make phone calls or send text messages to dropouts to inform them of their reenrollment options.
- **Letters.** Staff members send personalized letters to students asking them to return to school.

- **Home visits.** Teams of school personnel and volunteers visit homes of out-of-school youth to encourage them to return to school and provide them with their reenrollment options.
- **Social networking sites.** School personnel "friend" students on facebook to share information with them about reentry programs.
- **Information sharing between schools and districts.** Schools and districts share names of students who have dropped out of school or reenrolled in school.
- **Collaboration with community-based organizations.** Youth-serving organizations provide student referrals or serve as distribution sites for information on reentry programs. Some organizations provide outreach workers to meet with students and help them reenroll in school.
- **Partner with for-profit organizations.** School districts pay private companies that specialize in dropout recovery to locate students and reenroll them in school.
- **Reengagement fairs.** Representatives from district schools, charter schools, trade schools, community colleges, and GED testing centers attend fairs to provide information for out-of-school youth on their reenrollment options.
- **Reengagement centers.** Students attend centers to have their transcripts evaluated, find out about their reenrollment options, take online credit recovery courses, and get life-skills training.
- **Media campaigns.** Reentry programs are advertised in newspapers, on cable television channels, radio stations, billboards, and flyers posted throughout the community.
- **Direct outreach.** School teams go to housing developments, malls, sporting events, and other locations where out-of-school youth congregate, to share information with youth about reentry programs.

Characteristics of Reentry Programs

Students with disabilities who drop out of school face many barriers to school completion and reentry programs specifically aim to reduce these barriers. A review of reentry programs operating around the nation revealed six common characteristics of reentry programs. These characteristics are:

1. **Flexible Programming**. Examples include: year-round programs; open-enrollment policies; programs offered in multiple locations in the community; evening programs, partial day programs; Saturday classes; distance learning; self-paced programs, independent study with supplementary tutorials, and alternative ways to earn credits, such as performance-based methods.
2. **Credit Recovery, Credit Accrual, and Dual Credits.** Examples include: online credit recovery programs; mastery testing; and opportunities to earn credits for life skills, community service, or work experience/internships with local businesses. School/college partnerships enable students to simultaneously earn high school and college credits.
3. **Meaningful Curricula.** Examples include: job training and internships with local businesses, community service and service-learning opportunities, and curricula geared towards students' personal postsecondary and/or career interests.
4. **Services and Supports.** Examples include: referrals to social service agencies; help with transportation and child care, tutoring, and the provision of case managers and mentors.
5. **Staff Involvement.** Examples include: staff who are accessible to students, and staff who work with students on an individual basis, monitor their progress, and attend to their academic, social, and emotional needs.
6. **Partnerships.** Examples include: social service agencies that provide additional services for students and their families, community and technical colleges that enable students to earn college credits while enrolled in high school, and local businesses that provide opportunities for students to gain work experience.