



NDPC-SD STATE AGENCY SURVEY RESULTS

The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities administered the first *Annual State Education Agency Survey of Dropout Prevention Programs for Students with Disabilities* in the Fall of 2004 to State Departments of Special Education in 60 US states and territories. Thirty-one states returned completed forms. Results of the survey indicate that statewide initiatives to prevent dropout among students with disabilities are rare across the nation with only nine of the responding states offering relevant statewide programs. Only a minority of programs offered were among the research-based programs surveyed in the publication *Essential tools: Increasing rates of school completion: Moving from policy and research to practice: A manual for policymakers, administrators, and educators*. The lack of statewide initiatives highlights the need for understanding state needs for technical and other external support to increase the presence and effectiveness of such programs. The survey sought information about three aspects of external support:

1. general need for external support,
2. external support or information to be provided specifically by NDPC-SD, and
3. preferred means of delivery of external support

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WHAT THE STUDY OF SLIIDEA TELLS US ABOUT DROPOUT PREVENTION EFFORTS

Dropout Prevention: What the study of State and Local Implementation and Impact of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (SLIIDEA) tells us about dropout prevention efforts.

SLIIDEA is a six year multi-method longitudinal study of states', districts' and schools' implementation of major components of the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The results reported here were based upon surveys sent to states, school districts, and schools. Case studies of selected districts nested in states were also included. This brief article highlights some major findings related to state and district efforts towards reducing dropout among students with disabilities.

State Education Agencies:

State accountability and support systems for dropout prevention are just emerging.

- During the 2003–2004 school year, only 10% of all states reported having written guidelines for districts and schools on dropout prevention for students with disabilities.
- Of 41 states responding to the survey, 77% (30 states) publicly reported aggregated and disaggregated dropout rates of students with disabilities.

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STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

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The facts are grim. The dropout rate for students with disabilities is higher than for any other subgroup. English Language Learners (ELLs) are often over-represented in special education. School principals and teachers are struggling with NCLB regulations and meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), have limited resources, and are understaffed in qualified staff and faculty who are certified in special education.

Within this current reality, how do schools better serve students with disabilities and reduce their chances of dropping out? The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), in partnership with Clemson University and Education Development Center, Inc. are helping educators, researchers, parents and families, and communities answer this question through the **National Center for the Prevention of Dropouts for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD)**.

Acknowledging the critical role that parents have in the education of their children, **IDRA** recently interviewed a parent about concerns, issues, and best practices in the successful education of students with disabilities.

Ms. Sylvia Marcus has first-hand experience with schools and disabled students. She has her bachelor's degree in elementary education, her master's degree in education administration, and is certified in special education, bilingual education, and administration and supervision. She also has twenty years experience as an administrator, having served as principal at three different elementary schools in San Antonio, Texas and eighteen years as a special education teacher. She also served as the summer school director and a curriculum writer in social studies and bilingual education. And in "retirement," she is a surrogate parent for the San Antonio Independent School District (ISD). As a surrogate parent, she represents students who are wards of the state, those who are homeless or living in shelters. She also serves as a member of the NDPC-SD advisory committee.

Sylvia Marcus can speak with the voice of a school principal, a special education teacher, and a summer school bilingual education director. But perhaps her

most compelling voice is that of a grandparent with a speech disabled grandchild. In that role, she has advocated for him at his school and intervened when it was clear that her grandson had other options. In one case, his high school was going to place him in an early mathematics course despite his earning the highest mathematics scores in algebra among his peers. The decision to place him in early math courses had been based on his designation as needing special education but no one had checked that all he needed was help with his speech. No one ever looked at his test scores and his counselor had never checked other criteria needed to determine eligibility. Ms. Marcus intervened and her grandson was re-assigned to honors classes in mathematics (in which he excelled). Once she found out that the school was providing help with only 15 minutes for speech a month, she encouraged her grandson to go into drama and English literature. As expected, his speech improved.

Given this extensive experience with students with disabilities, IDRA asked Ms. Marcus for her insights on issues and what she has seen works best for students and their families, particularly Hispanic families. Here is a synthesis of that interview.

What do you think school principals need to know to better serve students with disabilities? And their families?

Principals are often not certified for special education and therefore do not understand the processes and compliance issues involved with disabled students. As a result, many are not comfortable meeting with the families before an ARD, for example. Yet the principal meeting with parents and families just 15 minutes before an ARD (Admission, Review and Dismissal) can make a world of difference for the students and their families. Most families are walking into a school where they may not feel welcome. They walk into a room with ten people using jargon, "the language of special ed" to talk about their child.

As a principal, Ms. Marcus would ask parents to visit 15 minutes before a meeting and would explain the process to them, the placement options and what

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services would be provided for each. On a one-to-one basis, families would ask questions—something they seldom did in a large group.

What do teachers need to better serve students with disabilities? And their families?

Teachers need a strong administrator who is familiar with or certified in special education and who will support them when they are needed. As a principal, Ms. Marcus would intervene and support her teachers in classroom crises on a moment's notice.

How can schools better serve Hispanic students and their families who are English Language Learners (ELL) and may be in special education classes?

Someone from outside the school (a certified supervisor or counselor, for example) needs to observe the child in the area of low performance for 45 minutes (one class period) and determine if they really need to be in special education. Often the child is ELL and should not be in special education. Frequently, it is the counselor who is asked to observe but has limited time and will only observe the student for maybe 10-15 minutes making final determination questionable.

In San Antonio ISD, a committee consisting of the principal, counselor, and teacher complete a form that lists the child's strengths and needs. One of the best practices Ms. Marcus has seen was at Carroll Elementary School where the committee consisted of the head of the counseling department at SAISD, a registered nurse, a speech therapist, parent, social worker, psychologist, teacher, and the school principal. Together, they decided placement and services needed including getting counseling and therapy on site. With this process, many students were not placed in special education classes and instead teachers were given strategies for helping the child. This worked exceptionally well for the child and the teacher did not feel alone or overwhelmed because they were provided specific intervention strategies.

What do Hispanic families need to know to make the school system work for their children who are disabled?

Families always have to make sure the school is following the IEP for their child and is doing what

was promised. If it is not, they must intervene and advocate for their child. This can be facilitated if they find someone at the school who will also advocate for their child.

What do you think schools are doing right for students with disabilities and their families, particularly Hispanic families?

Schools are trying to work with parents to see what strategies can be used with their children at home. Many schools now provide inservices for communities and parents, and encourage them to see what is happening in the classrooms.

Schools are also engaging the private sector and communities to partner with them. Ms. Marcus remembers one program at Carroll Elementary School that enlisted the help of FBI agents, community leaders, church members, and professional men's groups as mentors. The most important thing the mentors did was listen to the children and help them with their reading. But a successful mentoring program is only possible when the school provides guidance and support to the adult volunteers. Community engagement is often a matter "of going out and asking."

What do you think schools need to change to work for students with disabilities and their families, particularly Hispanic families?

Schools must be more open to families and communities. The school belongs to the community and they need to let the community and parents know they are welcome. Educators may leave the schools but parents and communities remain; schools are theirs to sustain and help thrive. If educators truly believe in parent involvement, then they go into the community, into parents' homes, and show them they are needed and invited to their children's schools.

Schools also need to make sure that families understand testing and assessment. Many families do not really know about the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and its implications for their children in special education. Furthermore, some educators and parents believe that testing under NCLB will not help students with disabilities. They maintain that these students need to be tested at their functioning level.

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NEW REPORTS

There have been a number of reports and articles recently focusing on high school dropouts and improving graduation rates. You will find a brief description of several of them below.

» **Apling, R. N., & Jones, N. L. (2005, January). *Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): Analysis of changes made by P.L. 108-446. (CRS Report for Congress, RL32716).***

Retrieved April 1, 2005, from:

<http://www.ccc.sped.org/pp/docs/CRSAnalysisofNewIDEAPL108-446.pdf>

Apling and Jones present a succinct review of the changes in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that will take effect on July 1, 2005. Changes include: a new definition of “highly qualified” special education teachers and a requirement that all special education teachers be highly qualified; and revised state performance goals and requirements for students’ participation in state and local assessment to align these requirements with those in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA).

» **Darling-Hammond, L., Rustique-Forrester, E., & Pecheone, R. L. (2005). *Multiple measures approaches to high school graduation.***

Retrieved April 7, 2005, from

<http://schoolredesign.net/srn/mm/mm.php>

There has been much debate about the effect of single-test approaches to graduation versus using a broad range of measures. A recent large-scale study found that states requiring graduation exams had lower graduation rates than states not using exit exams. There is grave concern about the effect of exit exams on the graduation rates of students with disabilities. The assessment systems of 27 states are profiled. Many of these states offer alternative measures and sources of evidence for students with disabilities to receive a regular diploma. These alternatives include modified assessments, accommodations, and a portfolio assessment system. The specific options allowed by the states are profiled in the appendix.

» **Lehr, C. A., Johnson, D. R., Bremer, C. D., Cosio, A., & Thompson, M. (2004, May). *Essential tools: Increasing rates of school completion: Moving from policy and research to practice: A manual for policymakers, administrators, and educators.***

Retrieved July 14, 2004, from

<http://www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/dropout/default.asp>

This publication is almost a year old, but it should be on the bookshelf of anyone interested in dropout prevention for students with disabilities. It provides a synthesis of research-based dropout prevention and intervention and provides examples of interventions that show evidence of effectiveness. The manual is divided into four parts: what do we know about dropout prevention? How were sample intervention programs selected? What works in dropout prevention? Where else can I go for more information?

» **National Association of Secondary School Principals. (2005, April). *What counts: defining and improving high school graduation rates.***

Retrieved April 12, 2005, from

http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/sec_news.asp?TRACKID=&VID=167&CID=89&DID=50357

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) looks at the complex issue of high school dropouts and high school completion rates. The report discusses the various ways of calculating high school graduation rates and offers policy recommendations for improving calculations and outcomes. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) defines graduation rates for public secondary schools as “the percentage of students who graduate from secondary school with a regular diploma in the standard number of years” (NCLB, 2002). NCLB does not allow alternative diplomas or certificates to be included in the graduation rate. Using the new federal systems of calculating the graduation rate for 2002–2003 for special education students was 39.5%, including students who earned a certificate of completion, down from 51% the year before. NASSP

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NEW REPORTS *continued*

makes three recommendations for improving graduation rates:

- Build high school capacity to address the academic needs of low-performing high school students by creating a new and separate funding stream.
- Improve high school students' academic achievement and graduation rates by funding and expanding adolescent literacy initiatives.
- Place priority on student mastery of subject rather than just completion of seat time by allowing states the flexibility to address grade level structures and high school completion options.

» **National Center on Secondary Education and Transition. (2004, December). *Topical report: A national study on graduation requirements and diploma options for youth with disabilities.***

Retrieved April 1, 2005, from <http://www.ncset.org/publications/relatedpubs.asp>

This report is similar in content to the document by Darling-Hammond, Rustique-Forrester, & Pecheone mentioned previously. State directors of special education in all 50 states and the District of Columbia were sent a survey regarding state graduation policies and practices. Results are presented in easy-to-read tables. The most common practice found was for the state to provide minimum requirements and extend options to the local education agencies to add to them. The intended and unintended consequences of graduation requirements and diploma options are presented. One of the intended consequences is more students with disabilities will participate in the general education curriculum and achieve results. An unintended consequence is higher dropout rates may result as students' frustrations rise through encountering difficulties in passing state and local school district exit exams. Graduation policies are in a state of flux at the present time as schools adapt to the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act and the reauthorization of IDEA. The authors suggest that it is important that researchers pursue the study of the impact of alternative diplomas on students' future opportunities for education and employment. ♦

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"If they were working at grade level, they would not be in special education."

As educators and parents grapple with the many challenges facing students with disabilities, much can be learned from those who have "walked the talk" and seen what works best for disabled students. Ms. Marcus provides some insights on best practices that include creating a safe, non-threatening environment for simple, clear communication between one educator and parents, educators who have expertise in special education and understand firsthand the many complexities, regulations, and options, and

engaging the services of a diverse group of concerned and experienced practitioners from teachers to speech therapists, registered nurses to psychologists and of course, parents, to work together to ensure disabled students receive the best education and services and reverse the current dropout trend for student with disabilities. ♦

A special thanks to Ms. Sylvia Marcus and Ms. Frances Guzman (who helped coordinate the interview) for their contributions to this article.

State External Support Needs for Dropout Prevention Programs for Students with Disabilities

Respondents were asked to report the types of external support needed to improve effectiveness of current or potential programs or to scale up programs in existing or additional locations for dropout prevention services for students with disabilities. Technical Assistance support needs predominated in a range of topic areas, including:

- Development of supportive legislation
- Program design support
- Program improvement support
- Creation of enhanced awareness of relevant problems and remediation issues
- Development of coherence among current diverse and fragmented efforts to form a consolidated statewide effort

Also predominant were statements of interest in model programs and related information. Notably, several respondents expressed need for model programs previously demonstrated to be effective in states demographically and socio-economically similar to their own. This indicates interest in modeling programs with a demonstrated record of effectiveness. It also demonstrates understanding that program effects may be situationally dependent and interest in models that match the contexts of states seeking to replicate them.

Needs were also commonly expressed for outside assistance in increasing funding resources through state legislative action, federal support, other grant support, or private sector sponsorship. Several respondents reported needs for assistance in improving state-level information systems to increase understanding of the extent of relevant problems, assess effectiveness of remediation programs, and support funding acquisition.

States' Needs for Technical Support and Information Services from the NDPC-SD for Improving Dropout Prevention Programs for Students with Disabilities

Respondents were asked what types of technical support and informational services the NDPC-SD

could provide to develop, improve, and advance dropout prevention programs for students with disabilities or to scale up such programs in existing locations or additional locations to more effectively reduce dropout among students with disabilities. Responses to this inquiry also predominantly concerned needs for information about model programs, again with emphasis on contextual similarity to states seeking to replicate models, on model programs with sound research bases, and on a variety of focuses of technical support. Technical assistance issues again reflected concern for promoting legislative action and support at the state level, development of comprehensive statewide coherence among various individual programmatic efforts, improvement of information systems, and capacity and awareness building regarding dropout prevention for students with disabilities.

Several respondents expressed need for outside support of state-level research to improve the understanding of the depth of problems and parameters regarding dropout among students with disabilities, as well as for determining the effectiveness of intervention efforts. Also, several respondents expressed need for assistance with the development of human resources ranging from public school personnel, intervention program operators, and students.

Preferences of Modes of Delivery of External Support

Respondents were asked to indicate what modes of delivery of external support would be most useful to improve the effectiveness of programs, scale up existing programs, or to promote development of new programs to more effectively reduce dropout among students with disabilities. By far the most prevalent responses to this inquiry were for use of various electronic communication methods including web site information, electronic newsletters, e-mail and listserv communications, etc. Print and media products (white papers, video productions) were also mentioned as viable methods of extending support to states. Traditional conferences, institutes, and workshops were indicated to be of continuing value and several mentions were made of Communities of Practice scenarios for peer-based support. ♦

- Twenty eight states reported attendance rates for students with disabilities. Only 13 states reported both aggregated and disaggregated rates.
- Twenty three states reported providing one or more resources to support dropout prevention programs for students with disabilities. Five states provided competitive grants; 17 provided statewide training; 17 provided state supported personnel.
- Of the 50 states, only one state reported having reached or almost reached the designated target for reducing dropout rates; 25 states reported that they were just beginning to make progress in decreasing dropout rates among students with disabilities; 23 states reported that they were making satisfactory progress; Two states reported that decreasing dropout rates among students with disabilities were not a priority at this time.

Local School Districts:

During the 2002–2003 school year 85% of districts reported some dropouts among students with IEPs ages 14–21. On average, districts reported about 16% of their students with IEPs dropped out of school between the ages of 14 and 21.

School level practices and district and state actions to address dropout for students with IEPs are quite limited. Actions include developing formal dropout prevention programs, tracking risk factors, and assigning a designated staff person to monitor dropout among students with disabilities.

- Sixty-nine percent of districts reported having a formal dropout prevention program or a dropout recovery program. However, dropout recovery programs were predominately found only in urban schools.
- Half of all high schools reported that they had a staff person with responsibility for dropout prevention and recovery for students with IEPs.
- About three-quarters of schools tracked at least one dropout risk factor for students with IEPs. About 15% of schools tracked all eight factors.
- Schools with a formal dropout prevention or recovery program and schools with a staff person responsible for dropouts were the most likely to track at least one risk factor.
- About a third of schools used all three practices: a formal program, designated staff, and tracking risk

- factors. Few schools used none of these practices.
- The use of a designated staff person and the tracking of risk factors were generally not related to a school's demographic features.

The following risk factors were tracked by districts.

- Excessively absent (72%)
- Consistent discipline problems (68%)
- Suspended once or more (61%)
- Juvenile justice involvement (47%)
- Previously retained in grade (45%)
- Older than norm for grade (40%)
- Limited English proficiency (38%)
- Family or economic problem (29%)

State and district policies, as well as school practices were associated with principal reports that schools had well prepared special education teachers on strategies for dropout prevention or recovery of students with IEPs. However, only about a third or fewer of the special education and general education teachers were perceived to be well prepared in strategies to prevent students with disabilities from dropping out of school.

State and district resources were not usually targeted to address dropout prevention, however, when district resources were provided these resources did appear to be targeted at the neediest districts. Large districts and urban districts were most likely to:

- Receive resources from the state
- Provide resources to schools

High poverty and high minority districts were most likely to provide in-service professional development to school personnel on dropout prevention strategies for students with IEPs.

Among the state and district policy actions examined, only state public reporting of dropout rates was associated with the district wide percentage of students with IEPs who dropped out. Both state policies and school practices were associated with whether or not schools had a formal dropout prevention or recovery program.

School policies and practices are probably more likely to influence school dropout levels than public reporting.

To view the full report visit www.abt.sliidea.org ♦

TELEPHONE SEMINAR DROPOUT PREVENTION: THE (EX)STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

Presenter:
**Dr. Larry
Kortering**
**Professor of
Special Education
Appalachian State
University**

*For those of you who
could not attend...*



NDPC-SD recently launched a new series of quarterly telephone seminars, with "Dropout Prevention: The (Ex)Students' Perspective." The February 28 virtual phone seminar featured Dr. Larry Kortering, Professor of Special Education,

Appalachian State University. The session examined youth perceptions of high school and the role these perceptions might play in developing interventions that hold promise for keeping more youth with and without disabilities in school until graduation.

Dr. Kortering's current research focuses on helping high school teachers to develop programs that are more responsive to the needs of youth at risk of dropping out and helping them to succeed in today's high stakes testing environment. His presentation focused on the results of both his interviews with school dropouts and annual surveys with more than 1,000 high school students.

A complete transcript of the program is available on NDPC-SD's website:

<http://www.dropoutprevention.org/NDPC-SD/calendar/index.htm>

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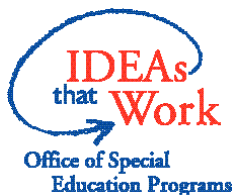
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The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is committed to positive results for children with disabilities. **The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities** is an **IDEAs that Work** project. Project Officer: Dr. Selete Avoke.

For additional information visit our website at www.dropoutprevention.org or E-mail us at NDPCSD-L@clemson.edu

NDPC-SD and the Big IDEAs eNewsletter is a partnership among the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC), Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), and Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC).