



# Big IDEAs

Dropout  
Prevention  
Strategies

## **BIG IDEA—SUCCESSFUL, DROPOUT PREVENTION EFFORTS MUST SIMULTANEOUSLY ENGAGE AND STRENGTHEN STUDENT SUPPORTS ACROSS SCHOOL, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY**

### **The Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (ALAS) Model**

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#### **» Background—Why Target Latinos?**

Compared to white students with disabilities and to non-disabled Latino students, Latino students with disabilities face dramatically higher risks of leaving school before they graduate. By recent estimates from the U.S. Department of Education, more than 22,000 Latino students with disabilities (43.5%) in a given year were lost from our nation's public school enrollment prior to graduation (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). In other words, less than half of Latino students with disabilities graduated from high school with a standard diploma.

While national concern about the high rate of attrition among Latino students is on the rise, relatively few initiatives have focused on the needs of minority students with disabilities. Looking just at the question of counting and reporting, as of 2000-01, only nine states issued dropout data that disaggregated rates for students with and without disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Although the most recent SLIIDEA report suggests improvement, Schiller, Bobronnikov, O'Reilly, Price, and St. Pierre (2005) still find that for the 2002-03 school year fewer than half of states (22 states) publicly reported disaggregated dropout rates for students with and without IEPs. This is significant, as history has shown that focused dropout-prevention efforts have rarely begun "until counts of students that remained in school...became an important indicator of a school's effectiveness" (Robledo Montecel, Cortez, and Cortez 2004, p. 174).

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### **NDPC-SD RELEASES FIRST SYNTHESIS REPORT ON DROPOUT PREVENTION**



The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD) is pleased to announce the release of a new report, *The Effects of Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions on Dropout for Youth with Disabilities* ([www.dropoutprevention.org/NDPC-SD/resources/research.htm](http://www.dropoutprevention.org/NDPC-SD/resources/research.htm)). The report, created in partnership with the What Works in Transition Systematic Review Project at Colorado State University, is part of an effort to identify and synthesize research examining effective practices in dropout prevention for students with disabilities.

This systematic review summarizes scientifically-based research studies produced in the past two decades from three distinct perspectives: (a) cognitive-behavioral interventions, (b) dropout or dropout-related outcomes, and (c) samples of secondary-aged

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## **BIG IDEAS SUBSCRIBERS GIVE HIGH MARKS TO NDPC-SD eNEWSLETTER AND WEB SITE**

### **» Big IDEAs eNewsletter subscriber satisfaction survey**

A survey sent to over 430 subscribers of the *Big IDEAs* eNewsletter in July, 2005 produced 28 responses. The survey, which was available for three weeks, was developed in order to gather feedback about the quality and usefulness of our newsletter.

Ninety-six percent of the responders rated the quality of *Big IDEAs* as good or excellent, as well as reported that they found the information contained in *Big IDEAs* useful or extremely useful. 89% of the responders have read two of the three issues to date.

All 28 of the responders (100%) told us that they would recommend that others subscribe to *Big IDEAs*. In fact, 68% have already shared *Big IDEAs* with others, including special education and district administrators, faculty, teachers, supervisors, disability specialists and exceptional education coordinators, staff, and colleagues.

When asked in what ways *Big IDEAs* could be improved in the future, we received many comments telling us that they were satisfied with what we were doing to date, especially providing information that is timely, of interest, reflects current research, and provides links to additional information.

### **» Web site satisfaction survey**

We also disseminated an online survey to collect reader feedback about the NDPC-SD web site. The survey, which was available online for two weeks, asked readers a few general and demographic questions and then focused on readers' ratings of site quality, ease of use, and relevance, followed by questions about respondents' needs for information.

The survey generated a total of 44 responses from 30 states. 75% of the responders visited our web site 2 times, (18%), 3–4 times (30%), or 5+ times (27%).

Ninety-one percent (40 people) rated the quality of our web site as good or excellent, as well as indicating that they found locating information on our web site easy or extremely easy. 89% of the responders felt that our web site responded to their information

needs well or extremely well. 98% of the responders would recommend our site to others.

The information found most useful to our web users was (in decreasing order of usefulness):

- Effective Practices (77%)
- Resources and Materials (58%)
- General Information (51%)
- Model Programs (42%)
- Conference Presentations (35%)
- Statistics, Facts & FAQ (33%)
- Links to other web sites (33%)
- *Big IDEAs* eNewsletter (30%)
- Calendar of Events (26%)

When asked in what additional kinds of information or topic areas would our users like to see added to our web site, we received several comments telling us that they were satisfied with what we were doing to date, especially continuing with model programs and effective practices. Other suggestions included more research information by category such as at-risk high school and elementary students' attendance, successful SEA strategies to assist districts in supporting their schools, articles on State Department initiatives including funding targeted at dropout prevention, information about self assessment program reviews to assist in getting started with collecting data, and problem-solving discussion forums and opportunities to request information from other users of the site.

Input from our users and subscribers will be used to shape future technical assistance activities for state and local education agencies.

### **» Your Comments and Suggestions**

We want to thank everyone who took the time to provide us with their feedback!

While we received wonderful feedback from our readers, we are always interested in hearing your comments and suggestions for ways we might improve our eNewsletter and web site. We encourage you to contact us any time via phone, fax, mail, or email with your ideas and feedback. ♦

## NDPC-SD TELESEMINAR SERIES

NDPC-SD is pleased to announce the next three teleseminars in our series of upcoming telephone seminars:

» **October 5, 2005**

### **What Research and Practice Tell Us About Keeping Youth in School**

*Cammy Lehr, University of Minnesota*

» **December 8, 2005**

### **The Coca Cola Valued Youth Program: A Dropout Prevention Model**

*Maria "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Intercultural Development Research Association*

» **February, 2006** (exact date to be announced)

### **What Works in Dropout Prevention for Students with Disabilities**

*Brian Cobb, Colorado State University*

### **Who should attend these programs:**

Representatives of state education agencies, school based leadership teams, classroom and special education teachers, central office and building level lead-

ership, parent leaders, policymakers, and others interested in knowing what interventions work in dropout prevention.

Registration fee includes access from one telephone line and one set of reproducible participant materials. Participants can invite as many people to participate as one telephone connection can accommodate. After registering, instructions will be sent on how to access the seminar. Participants can pay using a credit card, check, or purchase order.

\* Registration fee is waived for state education agencies and parent training and information centers.

**Site Registration Fee per Teleseminar: \$75.00\***

**For More Information and a Registration Form, Contact: Deb Hall at 800-225-4276 ext. 2168 or [dhall@edc.org](mailto:dhall@edc.org)** ♦

## **COMING SOON . . . EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS IN DROPOUT PREVENTION: A PRACTICE BRIEF FOR EDUCATORS**

### **Cognitive Behavioral Interventions: An Effective Approach to Help Students with Disabilities Stay in School**

*Paul J. Riccomini, Loujeania Williams Bost, Antonis Katsiyannis, & Dalun Zhang. The authors are part of NDPC-SD's Exchange Team of Experts at Clemson University.*

#### **A Summary:**

Preventing youth from dropping out of school is an enormous challenge for school systems, especially students who display aggressive behaviors at school. While many aspects of managing student behavior in the classroom are challenging, chronic and severe aggressive behaviors are the most difficult to manage. The aggressive student is often characterized as verbally (i.e., defiant, use of profane and negative language) and physically (e.g., fighting, spitting, biting, hitting) abusive towards teachers and students. Generally, these students exhibit aggressive behaviors in all school situations, particularly in less structured situations (e.g., lunch, hallways, recess,

and inactive classrooms). These behaviors act as impediments to academic success and are threats to school completion. Given that, students with disabilities dropout at over twice the rate of their same-age peers, states and local education agencies are in need of dropout prevention interventions that work. When schools implement effective strategies there are extraordinary benefits for youth, communities, and society. One validated approach that works well to reduce physical and aggressive behaviors in youth with disabilities is cognitive-behavioral interventions. Cognitive-behavioral interventions have shown effectiveness across educational environments, disability types, ages, and gender in the reduction of dropout.

This *Practice Brief* provides educators with a conceptual understanding and technical information to assist in implementing cognitive-behavioral interventions that reduce aggressive behaviors in students. It is supported by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the What Works In Transition Synthesis Center, *The Effects of Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions on Dropout for Youth with Disabilities* (Cobb, Sample, Alwell, & Johns, 2005).

Look for the *Practice Brief* on the NDPC-SD web site soon. ♦

However, counting is just a first step. Effective programs must also transform the tendency to view the dropout problem as a failure of children, to instead recognize it as a sign of a system in need of change. Dropout prevention programs that work recognize the inherent value of each student and his or her family and hold an unwavering view that every child can learn. Successful state and school initiatives shy away from “silver bullet solutions” and move toward comprehensive, systemic approaches and reforms that improve every school’s capacity to keep every child in school (Robledo Montecel et al., 2004). Williams has noted: “Interventions must be intensive, comprehensive, coordinated and sustained. Anything less is naïve and will show only marginal results” (T.L. Williams as cited in Robledo Montecel, et al. 2004, p. 178).

Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (ALAS), one of three programs originally funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) in 1990, is one such example and a promising approach.

Founded on the idea that student success is shaped by three inter-related contexts—family, school and community—Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (ALAS) demonstrates an effective dropout prevention and reentry/recovery strategy that strengthens student supports in each context and builds stronger linkages among them. In IDRA’s experience, dropout prevention models that both address this family-school-community triad and are guided by a valuing, rather than deficit-oriented, perspective are most successful. To the extent that ALAS shows success in incorporating each of these elements in its design, the program provides an important model.

### » **Settings and Participants**

ALAS was developed, implemented and evaluated from 1990 to 1996 as a pilot intervention program in a low-income, urban, predominantly Latino middle school in Los Angeles. The program focused on youth with disabilities using a collaborative approach across influences of home, school, and community. In California, Latino students comprise roughly 40% of the K-12 student population; in the Los Angeles basin, 60% of public school students are Latino. The program school served approximately 2,220 students in grades 7 through 9. Within this population, ALAS

targeted two cohorts of special education students—77 students identified by the school district as having learning disabilities or severe emotional disabilities—and one cohort of 46 students identified as “comprehensively at risk” (CAR) students, based on poor academic performance, behavioral problems, and low-income status. A supplemental, on-site model, ALAS students participated concurrently in the intervention program and their regular school program for three years of junior high school. ALAS program staff were housed in an office on campus and included a supervisor, clerical staff, and counselor-advocates who served both as case managers to students and liaisons among students, school personnel, families and community agencies. Each student was assigned a counselor/advocate who worked as a case manager, coordinating all program components and interventions, ensuring that students received appropriate supports, and monitoring student performance. The counselor/advocate worked directly not only with the student but also with school personnel, parents, and individuals and agencies from the community. The supervisor, an experienced teacher-counselor, provided ongoing training to case managers and worked to build cohesion across school, family, and community settings.

### » **Program Description and Components**

As detailed below, the ALAS model involved four interrelated program components for (1) students, (2) schools, (3) families and (4) communities. The program focused on middle school, the juncture at which students are most likely to drop out of school and emphasized a combination of psychosocial and academic interventions.

**Students:** Through a student component, ALAS provided counseling, training in social and task-related problem solving skills, and recognition for academic excellence.

**School:** The program’s school component involved recognition and bonding activities, frequent teacher feedback to parents and students and intensive attendance monitoring.

**Family:** The family component engaged parents in training to increase their participation in school

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### » **Seventeenth Annual National Dropout Prevention Network Conference** ***Ready to LEARN: Helping Students Survive & Thrive***

October 15–19, 2005; Santa Clara, CA

*About the Conference:*

All over the country schools are learning that academic rigor and relevance of curriculum alone are not enough to raise test scores. When these are combined with interventions that build relationships with the students, the synergy produces improved yearly progress (AYP) in all subgroups. The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network is partnering with the California Education Alliance on this conference.

**More Info: Email Linda Shirley at: [paige@clmson.edu](mailto:paige@clmson.edu) or [www.edualliance.org/2005/readytolearn/](http://www.edualliance.org/2005/readytolearn/)**

## OTHER EVENTS

### » **CCBD International Conference on Behavioral Disorders**

***Making a Difference in the Lives of Children and Youth with Learning and Behavioral Problems***

September 22–24, 2005; Dallas, TX

**More Info: Contact Lyndal Bullock at 940-565-3583 or [bullock@coe.unt.edu](mailto:bullock@coe.unt.edu).**

**Or go to**

**[www.unt.edu/behavioraldisorders/home.html](http://www.unt.edu/behavioraldisorders/home.html)**

### » **DEC 21st Annual International Conference on Young Children With Special Needs and Their Families**

October 13–16, 2005; Portland, OR

**More Info: [www.dec-sped.org](http://www.dec-sped.org)**

### » **DCDT 13th International Conference** ***Reaching New Heights: Improving Student Outcomes in a Diverse World***

October 20–22, 2005; Albuquerque, NM

**More Info: [www.dcdt.org/](http://www.dcdt.org/)**

### » **DLD Annual Conference** ***Bridging the Gap Between Research and Practice***

November 7–8, 2005; Charleston, SC

**More Info: Email: [ExecDir@TeachingLD.org](mailto:ExecDir@TeachingLD.org) or [www.teachingld.org](http://www.teachingld.org)**

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activities and to support their student's academic improvement, and encouraged more frequent contact with teachers and school administrators.

**Community:** Through a community component, ALAS provided a bridge between school and home needs and community services (including mental health, social services, drug and alcohol treatment programs, job training, and sports and recreation programs).

Within these four program components, ALAS implemented the following specific interventions (Gándara, Larson, Rumberger, & Mehan, 1998).

1. Helping students strengthen problem-solving skills and social interactions through ten weeks of problem-solving instruction and two years of follow-up problem-solving training and counseling.
2. Building students' self-esteem, affiliation, and a sense of belonging at school through personal recognition and relationships with caring adults. Participating students received frequent positive reinforcement such as praise, recognition ceremonies, certificates, outings, and positive home calls to parents for meeting goals or improving behavior, attendance, and school work. Students

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could “hang out” in the ALAS lounge on breaks and after school and bring friends to ALAS parties. In general, they were made to feel nurtured by ALAS staff.

3. Improving student attendance and engagement not only through intensive attendance monitoring with daily contacts and follow up with parents, but also by helping students make up missed time in the program and academic work. ALAS staff increased student attendance by expressing a personal interest in their presence and participation in school.
4. Providing mechanisms for frequent teacher feedback to parents and students about classroom behavior, assignment completion, and homework. Through their problem-solving training, students were taught to incorporate teacher feedback to sharpen their thinking and problem-solving skills. ALAS counselors also regularly informed teachers about how students and parents are addressing their comments and evaluations.
5. Parent training on accessing community resources, as well as training on how to support behavioral changes, how to assess adolescent engagement in school, how and when to participate in school activities, how to review report cards and school credits, and how and when to contact teachers and administrators.
6. Integrating school and home needs with community services. Parents received information on a broad range of community resources, such as psychiatric and mental health services, alcohol and drug counseling, social services, child protective services, parenting classes, gang intervention projects, recreation and sports programs, probation, and work programs.

### » **Implementation Considerations— Barriers and Facilitators**

As the ALAS model depended on strengthening relationships among students, parents, teachers and community members, the program required new levels of rapport and trust. To achieve this, ALAS program operators and evaluators report that the program was challenged to interact across cultural barriers that traditionally separated classrooms from

communities, students from social services, and faculty from families (Gándara et al., 1998). To succeed, new bonds needed to be built with at-risk Latino students who had felt disowned by a school and environment that did not reflect their culture. For case management to be effective, ALAS staff needed to negotiate with faculty and school administrators, changing, for example disciplinary actions from suspension to additional tutoring and support. Respecting parents, students, agency personnel and faculty was critical to program success and facilitated openness to ALAS staff recommendations and built stronger intercultural relationships and student supports. While many efforts focused on developing stronger relationships among parents, teachers and school staff, ALAS implementers emphasized that building bonds with at-risk students was both a central challenge and critical to the success of the model.

### » **Evidence of Effectiveness**

A rigorous evaluation of ALAS showed dramatic, positive results for enhancing educational achievement during the intervention and one year after the intervention. At the end of ninth grade, for example, only 3 percent of ALAS students had dropped out of school compared to 18 percent of the highest-risk control students. Beyond merely keeping students in school, ALAS had a statistically significant impact on keeping students on track, improving their academic success and progress toward graduation. Program evaluators reported that 75% of ALAS students were on track to graduate within a four-year time-frame, compared to 44% of the comparison students (Gándara et al., 1998). ALAS students improved school grades for ninth grade classes and failed fewer classes than students in the comparison group. Findings also suggest that ALAS students benefited psychologically, socially and attitudinally from the interventions, “increasing persistence and commitment to educational attainment.” ALAS evaluators, however, also found that “the dramatic educational gains the ALAS students made fell away when the students entered Los Angeles high schools where ALAS was not being provided,” suggesting that ALAS-type interventions must be sustained through high school years to secure long-term gains.

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» **Additional Information and Resources**

Darling-Hammond, L. (1998). Unequal opportunity: Race and education. *Brookings Review*, 16(2), 28–32.

Hall, D. (2005, June). *Getting honest about grad rates. How states play the numbers game and students lose*. Washington, DC: The Education Trust.

Gándara, P., Larson, K., Rumberger, R., & Mehan, H. (1998, May). *Capturing Latino students in the academic pipeline*. Berkeley, CA: California Policy Seminar Brief Series.

Fashola, O., & Slavin, R. (1997). *Effective dropout prevention and college attendance programs for Latino students* [Electronic version]. Washington, DC: Hispanic Dropout Project. Retrieved November 19, 2001, from <http://www.ncbe.gwu/miscpubs/>

Mehan, H. (1997). *Contextual factors surrounding Hispanic dropouts*. La Jolla, CA: Hispanic Dropout Project.

National Association of Secondary School Principals. (2005). *What counts: Defining and improving high school graduation rates*. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Robledo Montecel, M., Cortez, J.D., & Cortez, A. (2004). Dropout-prevention programs: right intent, wrong focus, and some suggestions on where to go from here. *Education and Urban Society*, 36, 69–188.

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Thornton, H. (Ed). (1995). *Staying in school: A technical report of three dropout prevention projects for middle school students with learning and emotional disabilities*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs. *Twenty-Fifth Annual (2003) Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, vol. 1*, Washington, D.C. 2005. Retrieved July 24, 2005, from [www.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/osep/2003/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/osep/2003/index.html)

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## NDPC-SD RELEASES FIRST SYNTHESIS REPORT *continued from page 1*

youth with disabilities. It explores the relationship between cognitive-behavioral interventions/therapies and dropout outcomes and violent verbal or physical aggression for secondary-aged youth with disabilities. A total of 16 studies intervening with 791 youth with behavioral disorders, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders, and learning disabilities were reviewed.

The findings strongly support the efficacy of cognitive-behavioral interventions across educational environments, disability types, ages, and gender in the reduction of dropout and correlates of dropout. The research suggests greater success when cognitive-behavioral interventions are used together, and common curricular and instructional methods include training in problem-solving and situational self-awareness, role-playing, praise and recognition, and behavioral contracting. A series of more detailed implications for practice are suggested, as well as instructions on how to locate implementation strategies for these interventions in secondary schools.

The conceptual framework used to guide the philosophical orientation to this review was grounded in the ecological model of social functioning to help answer “what works” questions for preventing dropout for youth with disabilities. Dr. Loujeania Williams Bost, Project Director of NDPC-SD, explains that the information detailed in the report is designed

for state education agencies, school administrators, policymakers, researchers, and others interested in knowing what interventions work in dropout prevention, as well as how well the interventions work for specific students across disability categories. Dr. Bost states that the report is important “because students with disabilities, particularly those with emotional/behavioral disorders have exceptionally high dropout rates and evidence-based interventions are the most expedient route for schools to reduce the incidence of dropout for these children.”

To learn more about this report or to download a free copy, go to: [www.dropoutprevention.org/NDPC-SD/resources/research.htm](http://www.dropoutprevention.org/NDPC-SD/resources/research.htm) or call the Center at 866-745-5641.

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## SPREAD THE NEWS

We encourage the distribution of our Newsletter.

Big IDEAs may be distributed freely as long as it is not altered in any way, distribution is without charge, and all copies retain the NDPC-SD copyright notice.

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](http://www.dropoutprevention.org) or E-mail us at [NDPCSD-L@clemson.edu](mailto:NDPCSD-L@clemson.edu)

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