



BUILDING EFFECTIVE DROPOUT PREVENTION PROGRAMS—SOME PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FROM RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

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During the past two decades, high school completion rates for students with disabilities have increased significantly. While this represents an improvement over past rates, dropout rates among students with disabilities remain a national concern. According to data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2, more than one-fourth of youth with disabilities still leave high school each year without finishing.

Since 2004, the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD) has synthesized available research and practice in the area of dropout prevention for students with disabilities. Our efforts have yielded insights into why youth with disabilities drop out, the consequences faced by these youth, and effective prevention strategies. In this article, we share with you some of the key strategies and recommendations gleaned from research and practice. These strategies and recommendations

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TELEPHONE SEMINAR—PARTNERING WITH PARENTS IN DROPOUT PREVENTION: THE NEED AND THE HOW

Thursday, November 9, 2006
12:00 noon - 1:30 pm EST

Presenters:

- » Dixie Jordan, Co-Director of the Family and Advocates Partnership for Education (FAPE), PACER
- » Deborah Leuchovius, Director of the Technical Assistance on Transition and the Rehabilitation Act (TATRA) Project, PACER
- » Aurelio M. Montemayor, Director of the Parent Information and Resource Center, IDRA

As research indicates and experience sadly makes all too clear, students who drop out of school face a difficult future. They are more likely to be unemployed, incarcerated, and/or impoverished. For students with disabilities, the risks are intensified. However, families can play an important role in ensuring that their student with or without disabilities graduate. By staying involved, focusing on individual strengths, finding the right school setting, and holding high expectations, parents can help their children prepare for successful adulthood.

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can be used by state or local administrators as well as educators to guide the development of dropout prevention programs for students with disabilities.

About Causes—Students drop out of school for a variety of reasons. Understanding the factors that contribute to dropout helps ensure the development of effective dropout prevention programs and strategies.

- » Problem behavior coupled with academic difficulties or prior academic failure is one key to risk factors that is predictive of school dropout.
- » The repeated use of exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspension, has been identified as one of the major factors contributing to dropout. Exclusion from class due to disciplinary action also leads to lost instructional time and increased academic difficulties.
- » Academic progress and school completion are not equally distributed across disability, income, or ethnicity. Almost half of youth with emotional disturbances drop out. Youth with disabilities from low-income households continue to experience high dropout rates, and Hispanic youth have experienced the smallest improvement in school completion over time.
- » High absenteeism and being held back a grade are serious risk factors for dropping out that can be monitored by schools.

About Consequences—The consequences of not finishing high school are serious and costly to both society and the individual student.

- » Dropouts have fewer options for postsecondary education than do students who remain in school. Additionally, only a few dropouts complete a GED within two years of leaving high school.
- » Dropouts are more likely than high school graduates to need the support of living with parents in early adulthood, experience health problems, engage in criminal activities, and become

dependent on welfare and other government programs.

- » Dropouts are more likely to be unemployed or employed in low-skilled, lower-paying positions. While initial earnings may be comparable between dropouts and graduates, dropouts tend to work more jobs and earn less per hour than graduates. Dropouts also experience a “ceiling effect” in earning power much sooner than graduates.

About Prevention—Understanding factors associated with dropping out of school and addressing these factors early and systemically help decrease dropout rates.

- » Establish systems for routinely monitoring risk indicators associated with dropout prevention. Create a local action team to analyze these indicators and address dropout prevention at the local level.
- » Intervene early. High school is too late to begin dropout prevention programs, especially for youth in urban schools. Invest in improvements in early childhood education (emphasize reading and math).
- » Increase family engagement and school involvement. Get parents involved! Parents exert a powerful influence over whether their adolescent children with disabilities finish high school. Higher rates of school completion are associated with higher household income, better educated head of household, parents’ expectations that children will go on to postsecondary school, and greater family involvement at school.
- » Create school environments that are inviting, safe, and supportive. Safe and inviting environments facilitate learning and increase school attendance. Provide enhancements that increase school-wide social competence and positive behavioral supports.
- » Help students to address problems that interfere with learning. Provide or assist students

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in obtaining social, health, and other personal resources they will need to overcome obstacles to their learning and meet their emergent basic needs.

- » Use proven practices. There are some evidence-based programs that can be used to address dropout and the factors associated with dropping out. Implement strategies that promote academic success, decrease inappropriate behaviors, and increase student engagement. Personalize programs as needed to address individual student needs and improve post-school outcomes.
- » Listen to students. Students can tell you a lot about strategies and practices that will make school more relevant to them and increase their desire to stay there.
- » Provide relevance and rigor. Provide opportunities for students to apply their learning in relevant, real world situations and help them see the connections to their own futures.
- » Help students build relationships at school. Enhance personal relationships with caring adults through organizational structures that provide time and opportunity. These relationships and connections enhance students' connection with school and facilitate successful school performance.
- » Focus on effective instruction. Create and implement systemic improvement activities that focus efforts on changing teaching and learning practices. These should promote academic engagement that leads to academic success and the acquisition of useful employment skills.

About Capacity Building—There is no quick fix that will end dropout. Effective dropout prevention cannot occur in a vacuum but must be carefully viewed within the context of a major school reform activity. It must be created within a system that provides an infrastructure for ongoing implementation and sustainability of proven practices.

- » Take a systemic approach to address dropout prevention. Steps taken by state and local education agencies to decrease dropout include (a) collection, analysis, and public reporting of dropout rates and related information for all secondary schools; (b) conducting causal analyses and needs assessments to identify causes and target resources; (c) providing information and technical assistance on dropout prevention strategies to school administrators; (d) providing training, funding, and support for local dropout prevention efforts; (e) reviewing and revising relevant policies (attendance, behavior, credit accrual, exit examinations, professional development) that impact school completion; and (f) collecting post-school outcomes data from youth including interviewing dropouts to find out why they left school.
- » Conduct causal analysis. Reaching consensus on cause(s) of dropout within the schools, particularly as related to school factors such as teacher attitudes and behavior, grading and discipline practices, quality of instruction, and teacher turnover creates a foundation for effective problem-solving around dropout prevention.
- » Use data to guide program development, professional development, and other school improvement efforts. States and local education agencies (LEAs) have a significant amount of data on factors related to school dropout among youth with disabilities. These data should be used for more than reporting purposes.
- » Consider multiple levels of implementation. One size may not fit all. Effective dropout prevention can occur at any or all of the following three levels within a school. Universal-primary prevention: includes all youth and is of low cost per individual (e.g., systemic positive discipline program, enhanced elementary curriculum, tutoring and mentoring programs). Selected-prevention/intervention: includes students who are identified as being at risk of dropout and is of moderate cost (e.g., programs that work to build specific skills such as problem-solving, self-maintenance, learning strategies). Indicated-intervention:

FEEL THE HEAT: MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL-WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT

Big IDEA—Reducing Dropout: Establishing Positive School Culture by Reducing Suspensions

By Stephanie Martinez, Technical Assistance Specialist, Florida's PBS Project, University of South Florida, and Robin J. Morrison, Instructional Supervisor, Division of Special Education & PBS District Coordinator, Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Problem behaviors coupled with academic difficulties or prior academic failure are key risk factors predictive of school dropout (Dunn, Chambers, & Rabren, 2004). Exclusion from class due to disciplinary action leads to lost instructional time and increased academic difficulties. The repeated use of exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspension, have been identified as one of the major factors that lead to dropout (Christle, Nelson, & Jolivet, 2004; McAndrews, 2001; Skiba, 2000).

As part of a state mandate to reduce the rates of suspensions for students with disabilities, Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) began a district-wide initiative to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline practices for these students. M-DCPS is the fourth largest school district in the United States and has a culturally and linguistically diverse student population, with approximately 156 different languages spoken within the district and 52 languages spoken in the special education programs. The district enrollment is over 350,000 students, averaging 70% free or reduced lunch in elementary, middle, and alternative education settings.

As a result of the state mandate, Ms. Robin Morrison, Instructional Supervisor, Division of Special Education, was charged with the task of identifying evidence-based strategies to reduce the rates of suspensions for students with disabilities. In response, Ms. Morrison initiated contact with Florida's Positive Behavior Support (FLPBS) Project. Positive Behavior Support is the application of evidence-based strategies and systems to assist schools to increase academic performance, increase safety, decrease problem behavior, and establish positive school cultures. With the support of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools' Office of Special Education and Psychological Services, Ms. Morrison formed a partnership with FLPBS Project. The

implementation of School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SW-PBS) was first initiated in M-DCPS during the 2004-05 school year. In order to ensure that SW-PBS was implemented with fidelity, a small pilot project, consisting of four schools, was conducted during the 2004-05 school year.

Currently, 15 schools implement PBS in Miami-Dade County: one elementary school, one K-8 center, 10 middle schools, two alternative schools, and one specialized center school. The suspension rates for these schools were significantly reduced, despite various obstacles the PBS schools encountered, including staff changes, numerous hurricanes, and philosophical differences among staff members. PBS school teams were trained to create a discipline referral process for staff to follow when student behavioral problems occurred. Individual schools were able to tailor the referral process to meet their needs.

An additional positive outcome associated with the implementation of PBS is the increase in school ratings, based upon the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Specifically, 80% of the schools implementing SW-PBS increased their letter grades during the 2005-06 school year and two schools maintained their letter grade from the previous year. The alternative schools and specialized center schools for students with disabilities are exempt from letter grades. Between the first and second years of SW-PBS implementation, FCAT reading scores increased, on average, by 10% for those students in the lowest quartile (students in this group often exhibit problem behaviors). These same schools averaged an 8% increase in reading achievement on the FCAT.

Having been in existence for only two full school years, PBS in M-DCPS is still in the early stages

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of implementation. Nonetheless, some schools have seen a significant decrease in the number of students who receive office discipline referrals (ODRs) and have shown a reduction in the use of ISS and OSS. The tables below show selected results from schools after one or two years of implementing SW-PBS.

Number of ODRs per 100 students:

Middle School #1	Baseline: *	Year 1: 38.53	Year 2: 7.07
Middle School #2	Baseline: 374.52	Year 1: 8.47	Year 2: **
Middle School #3	Baseline: *	Year 1: 55.09	Year 2: 24.36

Number of ISS Days per 100 students:

Middle School #1	Baseline: 24.00	Year 1: 16.88	Year 2: 8.03
Middle School #2	Baseline: 72.31	Year 1: 65.67	Year 2: **

Number of OSS Days per 100 students:

Middle School #1	Baseline: 27.99	Year 1: 8.73	Year 2: 1.16
Middle School #2	Baseline: 119.41	Year 1: 87.44	Year 2: **

* Denotes missing data (ODR Data not collected prior to Year 1.)

** Denotes data will be available after June 2007 (Schools are presently in Year 2 of implementation.)

This year, one of the PBS middle schools is utilizing a two-step approach to address the problems of over reliance on ODRs by providing alternatives to OSS. The first step of the intervention is once a student has three minor referrals written by a classroom teacher, prior to going to the office. The student will meet with the team leader to discuss the issue. During this step, PBS team members mentor repeat offenders during their planning periods. Next, the school partners with the district’s Parent Academy to hold Saturday Parent Life Skills Training as a positive alternative to suspension. If the parent and child complete this session, it will replace the suspension.

What has contributed to the success and growth of SW-PBS in Miami-Dade County Public Schools? Over 18 coaches support PBS schools through collaboration between district and regional center offices. The district continues to provide school support financially; provide PBS Coaches to serve as facilitators for each school; and provide planning time for PBS Coaches. These coaches are committed to the implementation of SW-PBS. The coaches’ responsibilities include participating in their assigned schools’ monthly or bi-monthly PBS Team Meetings, attending monthly coaches’ meetings, participating in a yearly action planning meeting, and attending any professional development related to PBS, including a 5-day summer training. In addition to their assigned duties, most of the PBS Coaches make time to attend reward events and write mini-grants for their schools. These highly motivated coaches also have developed collaborative relationships with community organizations and businesses, including the Miami Marlins and Bennigans, to support schools with their rewards program.

Ms. Morrison, the PBS District Coordinator, visits each school checking for fidelity, meets with new administrators to gain support, conducts the monthly coaches’ meetings, coordinates all trainings for the schools, and maintains regular contact with Florida’s PBS Project for technical assistance. In conjunction with the training, the district gives the schools two additional days to provide extra planning time. The district also provides funds for substitutes assigned to PBS School Teams. This allows team members (i.e., teachers) to have two professional development days a year to gain additional information on strategies to assist in the implementation of SW-PBS, to share successes, and to brainstorm solutions to obstacles that may occur. In addition, M-DCPS generates a monthly report for its schools that details the number of students with disabilities who receive in-school suspension (ISS) and out-of-school suspension (OSS) district-wide. The report serves to post school progress and increase awareness of the issue of the benefits of participating in the initiative.

Dixie Jordan is Co-Director of the Family and Advocates Partnership for Education (FAPE) at the Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights (PACER) and is an expert on the educational rights of children with disabilities. She has written curricula that are widely used by parent centers across the country on IDEA, positive behavioral interventions, and diversity issues. She is the parent of an adult son with disabilities.

Deborah Leuchovius, her colleague, represents PACER on several national technical assistance projects addressing transition and family issues, including the federally-funded Technical Assistance on Transition and the Rehabilitation Act (TATRA) Project. Ms. Leuchovius is also the parent, sibling, and daughter of family members with disabilities. Ms. Jordan and Ms. Leuchovius will provide participants with a brief summary of research highlighting the role of parents in dropout prevention, examine the need for parents and families to stay involved in the education of their sons and daughters throughout their middle school and high school years, and supply examples of practical strategies that families can employ to help teenagers succeed.

Aurelio M. Montemayor, Director of the Parent Information and Resource Center at the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), has worked extensively in the development and implementation of training and technical assistance programs for diverse students and communities. This includes work with youth and families in leadership training and his highly-popular WOW Workshop on Workshops guide and seminar. Mr. Montemayor will present IDRA's four dimensions of valued parent engagement, which includes parents as (1) teachers, (2) resources, (3) decision-makers, and (4) leaders and trainers. Mr. Montemayor will provide clear explanations as to how these four dimensions are reflected in effective educational policy and parent engagement practice.

Who should attend this program: Representatives of state education agencies, school-based leadership teams, classroom and special education teachers, central office and building level leadership, parent leaders, and policymakers.

Site Registration Fee – \$75.00*

***FREE to State Directors of Special Education, OSEP/OSERS & Regional Parent Information Centers**

Registration Fee Includes: Access from one telephone line and one set of reproducible materials.

Participants can invite as many people to participate as one telephone connection can accommodate. When you register, you will receive instructions on how to access the seminar from your telephone and how to receive participant materials by mail or e-mail. The seminar registration fee includes access from one telephone line and one set of reproducible participant materials. Participants can pay using a credit card, check, or purchase order. If you wish to use a purchase order, you must register by phone. All purchase orders must be made out to Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC).

Register by calling 1-800-775-7654 or email Deb Hall for more information at: dhall@edc.org.

SEMINAR CODE: 12079

KEY POINTS OF THE "TRANSLATING NATIONAL DATA INTO STATE AND LOCAL PRACTICE"
TELESEMINAR NOW AVAILABLE



On February 6, NDPC-SD presented a teleseminar, "Translating National Data into State and Local Practice." Dr. José Blackorby, a program manager for Disability Policy at SRI, International, presented research that

focused on how data from multiple studies and perspectives can be used for program planning and implementation at the state and local levels.

The teleseminar was designed to provide evidence-based information that will be useful to state education agencies, school districts, and schools in the design and implementation of effective dropout prevention programs to help students with disabilities stay in school and graduate. It was also intended to create dialogue between researchers who have successfully implemented effective approaches to reduce dropout rates, and state education agencies and local school personnel seeking to establish such programs.

Listeners from more than 32 state education departments, including Hawaii and the Virgin

Islands; parent training and information centers; the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP); several universities and technical assistance centers; local education agencies; and other agencies concerned about outcomes for students with disabilities participated in the teleseminar. Below are the seven Key Points which emerged from the teleseminar.

KEY POINTS

- » National research on students with disabilities has a long, 30-year history that has helped inform policymakers and educators.
- » Longitudinal studies provide insights into how things change over time.
- » Disabilities are a complicated construct.
- » There is tremendous diversity in the settings of specialized education services.
- » Most parents report being satisfied with the education being provided to their children.
- » Students who have stability in their school careers are more likely to complete school.
- » Students surveyed recognize that school is a part of their success in life but also express some reservations that they will actually be able to succeed in school.

The comprehensive, four-page Key Points document can be downloaded at:

www.ndpc-sd.org/econnections/docs/BlackorbyKeyPoints.pdf

UPCOMING EVENTS

» Bridging the Gap Between Research and Practice - CEC Division of Learning Disabilities
November 3-4, 2006: San Francisco, CA
Information: www.teachingld.org/pdf/2006DLDConference.pdf

» NASDSE 2006 Annual Conference and Business Meeting
November 12-14, 2006: Williamsburg, VA
Information: www.nasdse.org/events.cfm

» CADRE's 4th National Symposium on Dispute Resolution in Special Education
December 7-9, 2006: Washington, D.C.
Information: www.directionservice.org/cadre/fourthsymprfp.cfm

» Leadership for Equity and Excellence: Transforming Education
February 7-9, 2007: Washington, D.C.
Information: www.nccrest.org/events/events/national_forum_2.html

includes youth exhibiting clear signs of early school leaving, high need, and high cost, and may include intensive wrap-around services.

- » Examine the influence of other performance indicators on school completion. Look across indicators (dropout, graduation, secondary transition services, behavior, and post-school outcomes data) to get a better picture of how indicators influence each other and impact school completion. Use these clustered results to target improvement strategies that address multiple indicators and leverage resources.

Remember that effective dropout prevention programs exit as part of systemic reform to improve academic performance and behavior competence, increase professional competencies, and improve cultural climate, not as isolated projects.

Additional Resources

Bost, L.W., & Riccomini, P.J. (2006). Effective instruction: An inconspicuous strategy for dropout prevention. *Remedial and Special Education, 27*(5), 301-311.

Dynarski, M., & Gleason, P. (1999). *How can we help? Lessons from federal dropout prevention programs*. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Lehr, C.A., Clapper, A.T., Thurlow, M.L. (2005). *Graduation for all: A practical guide to decreasing dropout*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Lehr, C.S., Hansen, A., Sinclair, M.F., & Christenson, S.L. (2001). An integrative review of data based interventions: Moving beyond dropout towards school completion. *School Psychologist Review, 32*(3), 342-364.

National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (2006). *An analysis of state performance plan data for indicator #2 (Dropout)*. Clemson, SC. Available at www.ndpc-sd.org/assistance/docs/Indicator_2--Dropout.pdf.

Wagner, M., Newman, L., Cameto, R., Garza, N., & Levine, P. (2005). *After high school: A first look at the postschool experiences of youth with disabilities*. A report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) Menlo Park, CA: SRI International. Available at www.nlts2.org/reports/2005_04/nlts2_report_2005_04_complete.pdf.

As M-DCPS continues to implement its district-wide initiative to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline practices for students with disabilities, the district is presently in the initial stages of expanding their initiative to focus on dropout prevention. M-DCPS will leverage the success in PBS schools as a foundational strategy in dropout prevention for students with disabilities. Given the high numbers of students who leave school as a result of deficits in prosocial behaviors that often result in excessive suspensions and expulsions, a focus on dropout prevention within this context is a logical next step.

Due to M-DCPS' successful implementation of SW-PBS, the district received several inquiries from school-based administrators wanting to be a part of this initiative. This is why the PBS Coaches in Miami have adopted the theme "Feel the Heat!"

For more information regarding SW-PBS in Miami-Dade County, please contact Robin Morrison at rmorrison@dadeschools.net.

References

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Dunn, C., Chambers, D., & Rabren, K. (2004). Variables affecting students' decisions to drop out of school. *Remedial and Special Education, 25*(5), 313-323.

McAndrews, T. (2001). Zero-tolerance policies. *ERIC Digest, 146*. EDO-EA-01-03.

Skiba, R. J. (2000). *Zero tolerance, Zero evidence*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana Education Policy Center, Policy Research Report #SRS2, August 2000.

2006 NDPN CRYSTAL STAR AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

The National Dropout Prevention Network salutes the winners of the Crystal Star Awards of Excellence in Dropout Recovery, Intervention, and Prevention for Students with Disabilities. The Crystal Star Awards Program has been in existence since 1997, but this is the first year that a program and an individual working with students with disabilities were honored.

Congratulations to Suana L. Wessendorf, the state consultant for Behavior Disorders, Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services for the Iowa Department of Education, located in Des Moines, Iowa. Ms. Wessendorf's key responsibilities with the Iowa Department of Education include: behavior disorders, children's mental health, brain injury, suspension and expulsion, graduation, dropout, learning supports, and Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS).

As project manager for the Iowa Behavioral Alliance, an initiative with the Iowa Department

of Education, Ms. Wessendorf oversees the work of the Alliance that covers three domains: Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS), graduation/dropout, and school-based children's mental health (wraparound). Ms. Wessendorf has been a teacher of special education at the elementary and secondary levels and is a university lecturer for Iowa State University. Ms. Wessendorf has presented extensively and published numerous documents and articles for the Iowa Department of Education regarding national and state special education legislation, dropout prevention, and Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS) in many settings including correctional facilities. Ms. Wessendorf was also elected and served as the International President of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), as well as many CEC state and local positions.

For more information about the Crystal Star Awards of Excellence, go to:

www.dropoutprevention.org/about/crystal/excel_about.htm.

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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).