



Big IDEAs

Dropout
Prevention
Strategies

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BIG IDEA: TEACHERS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO INTERVENE NATURALLY AND FREQUENTLY WITHIN THEIR CLASSROOMS EACH DAY AND CAN PROVIDE SUPPORT AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS THAT BUFFER "PUSH EFFECTS" THAT LEAD TO

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY JOHN HAGER VISITS NDPC-SD



Pictured here with John Hager is Dr. Loujeania W. Bost, Director of NDPC-SD.

On February 12, 2007, Mr. John H. Hager, Assistant Secretary, [Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education](#) and Dr. James Button, Director of Communications and Customer Service Team conducted a site visit at the [National Dropout Prevention Center for](#)

DROPOUT.

By Sandra Covington-Smith, Ph.D., National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities, Clemson University

The process of dropping out of school is not a new phenomenon. Each year, thousands of students exit school informally and most do not return. Moreover, certain groups of students are at greater risk of dropping out as compared to their peers. Students with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable populations for school dropout and are twice as likely to drop out as compared to their non-disabled peers. The highest dropout rates for students with disabilities exist among students with learning disabilities and emotional disturbance.

Dropping out is a process of disengagement that begins early, sometimes as early as elementary school. Students at risk of dropping out show signs of disengaging and pulling back from school long before they actually leave. Students disengage due to negative interactions with adults; academic classes perceived as irrelevant; and a lack of satisfaction during their high school years. As a result, students develop negative attitudes toward school. They skip classes or do not attend school altogether. Oftentimes, students earn low grades, are faced with academic failure, and engage in disruptive behavior. In addition, students who are at risk for dropping out seem less interested or concerned about school. They have low expectations for their own success and believe that those around them (i.e., teachers and peers) share their views and hold low expectations for them and their futures as

[Students with Disabilities \(NDPC-SD\)](#). Mr. Hager and Dr. Button met with staff from both NDPC-SD and the [National Dropout Prevention Center/Network](#) at Clemson University (NDPC/N). An overview of the national dropout prevention centers' purpose, strategies, activities, and impact were reviewed and discussed. Additional information regarding the collaboration among [NDPC-SD](#), the [National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center \(NSTTAC\)](#), the [National Post-School Outcome Center \(NPSO\)](#), and the [IDEA Partnership](#) was provided. Future collaborative activities among the four centers were outlined, including those activities designed to leverage resources and help states build coordinated systems to improve post-school outcomes for students with disabilities.

On February 20, 2007, Mr. Hager and Dr. Button also attended the [19th Annual At-Risk Youth National Forum](#) in Myrtle Beach, SC, sponsored by NDPC/N and NDPC-SD. Mr. Hager addressed forum participants and specifically provided remarks that highlighted the collaborative partnership among the three transition related centers. Mr. Hager also provided valuable information regarding his support of and the need for transition related services and programs that lead to successful outcomes for students with disabilities.

PODCAST SERIES AND TRANSCRIPTS AVAILABLE FROM THE FEBRUARY 13, 2007 TELEPHONE SEMINAR—THE BIG

well.

As educators and practitioners continue to seek effective interventions to prevent dropout, they must focus on identifying, monitoring, and addressing those risk factors that can be influenced by teachers (e.g., academic performance, peer and adult interactions, attendance, and behavior). As a result, teachers' roles in dropout prevention are critical. Teachers have the opportunity to intervene naturally and frequently within their classrooms each day. Teachers can provide support and opportunities for students that buffer "push effects" that lead to dropout (e.g., academic failure; feelings of alienation and isolation; negative attitudes toward school; poor relationships with teachers and peers; and antisocial behavior). In this article, evidence-based strategies and recommendations are provided that teachers may use to guide dropout prevention efforts within their classrooms.

Recommendations for Teachers

In order for teachers to effectively address dropout related factors, it is imperative that the classroom is viewed within the context of three systems: (1) environmental, including adult interactions and peer relationships; (2) instructional, including both curriculum and instruction; and (3) behavioral, including expectations and rules. Within each of these systems are key variables that greatly impact students and their in-school experiences. When properly managed, these three systems work together to increase school engagement for students with disabilities.

FOUR: A FRAMEWORK FOR IMPROVING INSTRUCTION THAT LEADS TO SCHOOL COMPLETION



Dr. Jim Knight

a research associate at the University of Kansas, Center for Research on Learning.

On February 13, 2007, NDPC-SD presented a free teleseminar, "The Big Four: A Framework for Improving Instruction That Leads to School Completion." The Presenter was Dr. Jim Knight, a

About Dr. Jim Knight

Dr. Knight has spent more than a decade studying instructional coaching. He currently directs a comprehensive, district-wide school reform project, Pathways to Success, in the Topeka, Kansas School District. Pathways to Success employs school-wide curriculum reform, led by Instructional Coaches, to achieve wide-scale implementation of Content Enhancement, Learning Strategy, and Positive Behavior Interventions across all middle and high schools in the district.

Dr. Knight's articles on Instructional Coaching have been included in publications such as *The Journal of Staff Development*, *Principal Leadership*, and *The School Administrator*. His book,

»Environmental

Environmental systems consist of the physical setting, schedules and routines, and interactions and relationships. Students spend a large portion of their school day in the classroom. A safe and inviting environment facilitates learning, increases school attendance, and encourages students to stay connected and involved, both academically and socially. As such, it is imperative that students feel comfortable and supported while at school, especially in the classroom.

Teachers can assist students by implementing the following recommendations.

- **Create a personalized and orderly learning environment.** To ensure success, teachers should manage an organized, efficient, and functional learning environment. Students should be familiar with the classroom schedule and procedures. Classroom procedures and routines create structure and minimize negative interactions and inappropriate behavior, while providing continuity.
- **Build rapport with students.** Teachers are not only role models, but also ambassadors— ambassadors of academic instruction, social skills instruction, self-esteem building, goal setting, and relationship building. Therefore, teachers should create welcoming environments that provide clear guidelines and multiple opportunities for success for all students, while considering individual student needs, including students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Make a

Instructional Coaching, to be published by Corwin Press and Coaching Classroom Management, written with Randy Sprick, Wendy Reinke, and Tricia McCale, is scheduled to be published early in 2007. Jim is frequently asked to guide professional learning for instructional coaches and has presented and consulted in more than 35 states, most Canadian provinces, and Japan. He has also won several university teaching and innovation awards.

About the Teleseminar

One way to enable more students to stay in school and be successful is to improve the quality of instruction they receive. If more students successfully acquire the content, skills, and strategies they need to succeed, and if more students achieve success, then more students will graduate. Unfortunately, improving instruction is easier said than done. Many different factors are involved in the complex practice of teaching, and educators may be unsure about where to begin improving instruction.

In this 1 1/2 hour teleseminar, Dr. Knight described a framework, *The Big Four*, which professional developers, coaches, and other educators can use to find a starting point for this challenge. The Big Four Framework of (a) Classroom Management, (b) Content Knowledge, (c) Direct Instruction, and (d) Formative Assessment provides a simple, yet sophisticated way of analyzing critical variables in teaching and identifying next

commitment to ALL students.

- **Assist students with relationship building.** Students at risk of dropping out report feelings of alienation and isolation due to poor relationships with peers and adults, and assistance is often needed. Students desire acceptance and a sense of belonging and approval from peers and adults. Students need to know that teachers care about them and their future. Students want teachers who listen to them and are concerned with what they have to say. Model and reinforce positive relationships with both peers and adults. Acknowledge positive interactions often. Highlight the importance of positive relationships both in and outside the classroom.

» Instructional

Instructional systems consist of student assessment, curriculum, and instruction. Before students with disabilities physically leave school, most have "academically disengaged" and are simply attending classes. They are no longer engaged or actively involved in the learning process. As a result, students must be engaged and challenged. The following strategies can help teachers increase academic engagement within the classroom.

- **Assess a student's skills and knowledge in advance.** Identify the aspect of the curriculum or subject area that may cause difficulty for a student. When addressing "areas of need,"

steps in the important process of improving teaching practices. Individuals and groups looking for a starting point for instructional improvement should find this presentation extremely useful.

Audience Participation and Evaluation Feedback

The teleconference attracted a large audience of 108 representatives from 28 school districts, state departments of education, and organizations (or an average of 3.84 attendees per site).

In addition, 48 individuals completed the evaluation survey of the event. Attendees gave the program the highest ratings to date of all of the teleseminar and Webseminar events we have held. 100% of the attendees rated the overall teleseminar as "excellent," "very good," or "good," and 100% rated the content in the same way. 100% of the attendees answered "strongly agree," "somewhat agree," or "neutral" to the statement, "This NDPC-SD program was relevant to improving results for students with disabilities." 100% found the event to be "of high quality" and "useful to their organization" through their responses using the same scale as in the previous question.

100% of the attendees found the overall effectiveness of Dr. Knight's presentation to be "excellent," "very good," or "good." Moreover, all but one of the 44 respondents (95%) stated that they would participate in another teleseminar.

provide students with multiple ways to succeed academically and implement evidence-based interventions and strategies that ensure individual student success.

- **Identify the student's goals and your goals for that student—set high expectations and provide support.** Monitor student progress, identify potential barriers to success, and provide accommodations and support. Celebrate success!
- **Make content meaningful and functional.** Provide rigor and relevance during instruction. The classroom experience needs to be relevant to the "real" world. Students must view their classroom experiences as both applicable and significant. Embed pertinent examples within daily academic instruction. Make content meaningful for ALL students. Be certain to include culturally relevant examples throughout the curriculum and provide culturally diverse students with equal opportunities to participate during instruction. Effective teachers teach the whole student and respond to individual needs. Effective teachers believe that ALL students can achieve and act upon their beliefs.
- **Maximize time on academic tasks and minimize time on non-instructional activities.** Use instructional time efficiently, provide multiple means of engagement, and provide frequent reinforcement and acknowledgement. Maximize use of

Event Materials Now Available Online

Downloadable event materials, audio clips (MP4s), PDF transcripts, and contact information for Dr. Jim Knight are now available online at:

www.ndpc-sd.org/econnections/index.htm

BIG IDEAs SUBSCRIBERS GIVE HIGH MARKS IN NDPC-SD'S ANNUAL eNEWSLETTER AND WEB SITE SURVEY

NDPC-SD's Annual Survey was sent to 924 subscribers of the *Big IDEAs* eNewsletter in January, 2007. The survey was developed in order to gather feedback about the quality, usefulness, reach, and accessibility of our eNewsletter and Web site. Eighty four surveys were completed (a 0.09% return rate), which was up from 53 completed surveys (a 0.07% return rate) one year earlier. Participants' feedback will be used to better meet our users' needs for information about school completion issues and effective dropout prevention programs.

» Respondents

We received feedback from respondents living in 37 U.S. states and four countries outside of the U.S.

Of the 84 respondents who completed the survey, the breakdown of job titles is as

active or direct teaching procedures with groups of students.

- **"Emphasize the big picture."**
Encourage and remind students often of the importance of academic success and how it relates to their future as productive adults. Highlight the need for achievement within the classroom and its connection to their future success in secondary transition, post-secondary education, supported employment, or independent living.

»Behavioral

Behavioral systems consist of expectations and rules; reward systems, discipline, and effective consequences; and a behavior curriculum and social skills instruction. Behaviors are prerequisites for academics, and effective teachers have high expectations for both student achievement and behavior. Oftentimes, students' inappropriate behaviors result in academic failure. Problem behaviors coupled with academic difficulties or prior academic failure are key risk factors predictive of school dropout. However, a large number of students have not been taught specific school-wide expectations or classroom rules and continue to experience academic difficulty, even academic failure. Classroom rules may exist, but students are not completely aware of when and how to effectively display these behaviors, thereby resulting in behavioral errors (i.e., inappropriate behavior). The following principles will guide teachers in effectively addressing behavioral concerns within the classroom.

follows:

- 26 (31.0%) were SEA Leaders/Professionals
- 14 (16.7%) were LEA Administrator
- 11 (13.1%) were TA Providers/Consultants
- 5 (6.0%) were Parents
- 2 (2.4%) were Teachers

Twenty-six respondents (31.0%) indicated that their role was something other than the above.

»Web Site

Seventy-nine (94%) of the respondents rated the quality of our Web site as excellent or good (two rated it fair, zero rated it poor, and three individuals selected the "don't know" choice). Similarly, 74 (88.1%) of the respondents told us that our Web site responded to their information needs extremely well or well (one person reported that it didn't respond well, and nine individuals selected the "don't know" choice). Seventy-eight (92.9%) of the respondents found it extremely easy or easy to find information on our Web site (three individuals found it difficult and three people selected the "don't know" choice).

Seventy-one (84.5%) of the respondents have visited our Web site three, four, or five plus times. All 84 (100%) of the respondents reported that they would recommend our Web site to others.

- **Teach, model, practice, and reinforce/acknowledge classroom rules.** Rules should be stated positively and kept to a minimum. As a rule of thumb, limit classroom rules to a maximum of five. Do not simply post rules. Be certain to review rules persistently, making certain the rules remain relevant and students no longer need clarification. Apply rules consistently, considering the background of ALL students. Make certain rules are explicit, fair, and equitable.
- **Teach social skills as a proactive approach.** To learn better ways of behaving, students must be taught replacement behaviors (e.g., expectations and rules, social skills) and these behaviors must be consistently and persistently reinforced. Teaching social skills is the "unwritten curriculum" that, if not addressed, will greatly impede the implementation of the written curriculum. Teachers may also imbed social skills instruction within academic lessons through daily instruction.
- **Provide multiple opportunities for practice and feedback.** To retain new behaviors, students must be given specific, positive feedback and opportunities to practice the behaviors. Students learn appropriate behavior in the same manner they learn to read—through instruction, practice, feedback, and encouragement. Re-teach as needed!

When asked what information they found most useful on our Web site, 50 (59.5%) of the respondents reported Effective Practices. Resources and Materials was the second most useful section of information (49 respondents or 58.3%), followed by General Information (47 respondents or 56.0%), Statistics, Facts, & FAQ (37 respondents or 44.0%), Model Programs (36 respondents or 42.9%), Conference Presentations (32 respondents or 38.1%), the *Big IDEAs* eNewsletter (32 respondents or 38.1%), Links to Other Web Sites (23 respondents or 27.4%), and our Calendar of Events (12 respondents or 14.3%).

In terms of ways our Web site could be improved, we received many comments that the Web site did not need improving at all, that it met users' information needs, and that it has been a great resource.

»eNewsletter

When asked how many of the eight issues of *Big IDEAs* they had read, 18 (21.4%) of the respondents read six to eight issues, 24 (28.6%) read four to five issues, 20 (23.8%) read three issues, 11 (13.1%) read two issues, 7 (8.3%) read one issue, and 4 (4.8%) read none. Fifty-one respondents (60.7%) followed embedded links in the eNewsletter.

Subscribers reported that they read *Big IDEAs* online (66 respondents or 78.6%) as well as printed it out (31 respondents or 36.9%). Fifty-seven (67.9%) of the

Dropout prevention is not primarily a teacher issue, it is a systems issue; whereas, school-wide systems should ensure success for both students and teachers. As such, teachers must receive support when implementing strategies at the classroom level (i.e., environmental, instructional, and behavioral systems) to effectively address dropout and related factors. Teachers' efforts should not go unnoticed, but instead should be acknowledged, reinforced, and rewarded. As a result, teachers will feel empowered, as will their students.

Contact Information

For more information, contact:

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Additional Resources

Inside every student is a graduate: A boost can make the difference between dropping out or graduating. Retrieved April 10, 2007, from www.boostup.org/HS%20Brochure%20082806%20ENG.pdf.

Kortering, L. & Braziel, P. (1999). Dropout prevention: A look at what dropout youths have to say. *Remedial and Special Education, 20*, 78-83.

Lewis, T. (1997). Responsible decision making about effective behavioral support. Available

respondents told us that they shared *Big IDEAs* with others for many different reasons.

An overwhelming number of the responders (76 people or 90.4%) rated the quality of *Big IDEAs* as excellent or good (four rated it fair, zero rated it poor, and four individuals selected the "don't know" choice). Seventy-eight (92.8%) of the respondents reported that they found the information contained in *Big IDEAs* extremely useful or useful (one person reported it to be not useful and five people selected the "don't know" choice). Eighty-three (98.8%) of the respondents reported that they would recommend our eNewsletter to others. Only one person (1.2%) would not.

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.

UPCOMING EVENTS

» **15th Annual Model Schools Conference**

through the ERIC Clearinghouse.

Lunenburg, F.C. (2000). America's hope: Making schools work for all children. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 27(1), 39-46.

Scanlon, D., & Mellard, D. F. Academic and participation profiles of school-age dropouts with and without learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 68, 239-258.

Smith, S.C. (2007, February). *Dropout prevention for students with disabilities: Recommendations for teachers*. 19th Annual At-Risk Youth National Forum, Myrtle Beach, SC.

Voices of students on engagement: A report on the 2006 high school survey of student engagement. Retrieved April 9, 2007, from ceep.indiana.edu/hssse/pdf/HSSSE_2006_Report.pdf.

» Contact Us

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The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is committed to positive results for

June 30-July 3, 2007: Washington, DC

Sponsored by the International Center for Leadership in Education
www.modelschoolsconference.com

* * *

»2007 OSEP Part B Data Conference

July 9-11, 2007: Bethesda, MD

Sponsored by WESTAT

www.ideadata.org/About.asp

* * *

» PA Community on Transition Forum: Achieving Outcomes Through a Shared Agenda

July 18-20, 2007: State College, PA

www.pattan.k12.pa.us/files/Flyers07/transition2007.pdf

* * *

»National Autism Conference

July 30-August 3, 2007: State College, PA

More information will be available online at

www.outreach.psu.edu/conferences.html

SPREAD THE NEWS

We encourage the distribution of our eNewsletter.

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.

» Have a question or suggestion?

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.ndpc-sd.org
or E-mail us at NDPCSD-L@clemsn.edu.

» [Regístrese a nuestro boletín de noticias, Grandes Ideas: Estrategias Para Prevenir La Deserción Escolar.](#)

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