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In This Issue:

More Than Just a Dropout:
Creative Ways to Ensure
Successful Reentry

Tips for Reengaging
Students

NDPC-SD Highlights:
Nebraska's Effort to
Reengage Youth with
Disabilities

Persistence Pays Off:
Getting Students Back
One-By-One

Reentry News From
Around the Nation

Upcoming Events

Resource Center

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The Big IDEA:

While it is important to keep your currently enrolled students on track, it is also important to reengage students who have dropped out. It is never too late to get them back! Schools, community-based organizations, and community and technical colleges all over the country have experienced success at reaching out to students and giving them another chance to earn their high school diploma.



**More Than Just a Dropout:
Creative Ways to Ensure Successful Reentry**
By Julia Wilkins, Ph.D.

The 2012-2013 school year is well underway and we hope all your students are making good progress towards graduation. While it is important to keep your currently enrolled students on track, it is also important to reengage students who have dropped out. It is not too late to get them back! Schools, community-based organizations, and community and technical colleges all over the country have experienced





The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities, funded by the U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), works in collaboration with [Education Development Center, Inc. \(EDC\)](#), and the National Dropout Prevention Center at [Clemson University](#).

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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.



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success at reaching out to students and giving them another chance to earn their high school diploma.

Some districts have a specific reentry program housed in a school or in an off-site location. In other districts, students may just return to the regular school with extra supports. Regardless of the setting, students who have missed substantial amounts of schools will need support to help them succeed. The biggest barrier facing these students is often their lack of credits. This problem has been addressed by schools in a variety of creative ways. Online credit recovery is a popular option; however, many students lack the skills needed to independently work through courses. Many schools open their computer labs after school or on Saturdays with teachers on hand to provide assistance to students. Seat-time requirements can also be waived-some schools have addressed seat-time requirements by allowing students to complete work in an alternative location such as a counselor's office. Schools that offer community service or internship opportunities often allow students to count work experience towards course credits.

It is important to remember that students who drop out typically do so for multiple reasons, so they will need a holistic approach that addresses their social-emotional needs as much as their academic needs. Students may also need services, such as counseling or substance abuse treatment. Many students who drop out do so because they are parenting, in which case the lack of childcare often prevents them from returning to school. To address this barrier, some schools have partnered with local childcare centers. A recent nationwide survey found that 40% of students who wanted to return to school needed to work and could not balance work and school (Bridgeland & Milano, 2012). For these students, flexible programming is essential. The creative solutions schools have implemented to accommodate students' hours include allowing students to attend school in either morning or evening shifts; providing self-paced curricula; offering competency-based programs; and setting up programs in community locations. Lack of transportation is also a problem for a lot of students, particularly those who are homeless and transient, or live in rural areas. One school in Georgia solved this problem by partnering with the public transit system to provide students with bus passes. The good news is that there are many local organizations who would love to partner with you to help students in the local

community earn a high school diploma.

Organizations such as the United Way and faith-based groups are helping to reach out to students nationwide who have dropped out of school. Initiatives in which members of community groups and school districts work together to visit students in their homes to try to get them to return to school are now commonplace (see sidebar for websites of select initiatives). You may also want to reach out to community-based organizations and local colleges to provide mentoring, tutoring, medical services, or recreational facilities for returning students. Local colleges always have plenty of students in need of extra credit opportunities and tutoring a high school student to help them graduate might be the perfect fit!

For more information about reentry initiatives around the country, see "Characteristics of Reentry Programs for Out-of-School Youth" available from <http://www.ndpc-sd.org/>.

Initiatives involving visiting students at home to get them to return to school:

[We Want You Back Campaign - Minnesota](#)

[We Want You Back Day - Rochester](#)

[Student Recovery Day - Los Angeles, California](#)

[Expectation Graduation - Texas](#)

[Reach Out to Dropouts - Des Moines, Iowa](#)

[Reach Out NWA - Arkansas](#)

References:

Bridgeland, J. M., & Milano, J. A. (2012). *Opportunity road: The promise and challenge of America's forgotten youth*. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises and America's Promise Alliance. Retrieved from:

http://www.serve.gov/new-images/council/pdf/opportunity_road_the_promise.pdf

TIPS FOR REENGAGING STUDENTS

- Visit students at home to motivate them to return (the personal visit shows that you care, as does being persistent)
- Partner with local organizations to provide needed services such as childcare, transportation, and counseling
- Recruit mentors and tutors from local colleges, faith-based organizations, and other community-based organizations
- Offer flexible options, such as part-time attendance or competency-based credit
- Explore alternatives to seat-time requirements
- Provide online credit recovery courses and open computer labs in the evenings and on Saturdays
- Assign a caring adult to provide support and monitor students' progress throughout their enrollment



Nebraska's Efforts to Reengage Youth with Disabilities

Nebraska has prioritized an initiative to reengage out-of-school youth with disabilities. The initiative began about a year ago with the support of the NDPC-SD. After reviewing state data and evaluating current state-wide initiatives, it became clear that more information was needed on youth with disabilities who had dropped out of school. Why were students leaving school early? When did the students begin to disengage or lose interest in school? Did LEAs have supports in place to contact students who had dropped out of school and were eligible to return? Were LEAs prepared to adjust programming to offer the youth a different chance, not

just a second chance?

The answers to these questions were needed in order to identify the barriers and calculate possible solutions. Therefore, questions were added to the Nebraska Post-School Outcomes phone interview completed annually with students with disabilities who had exited school. Former students who had dropped out were asked additional questions. The data for these new questions have been collected and are now being analyzed. Additionally, through presentations and awareness activities, the state is beginning to learn more about what strategies are in place at the LEA level to support and reengage youth who have left school.

The next plan of action is to address what was revealed in the data. So in response, Nebraska is developing a system to partner with select LEAs to create or expand current processes for reengaging youth with disabilities. Emerging practices found to be successful in the pilot LEAs will be used as models for future state-wide implementation.

Nebraska continues to utilize resources such as the NDPC-SD three-part series, "Reentry Programs for Out-of-School Youth with Disabilities". The series has helped identify existing programs that the state has researched and learned from and it has also provided specific strategies which can be used by LEAs.

Finally, it is essential that the activities of this project are linked to other state and local initiatives in place to support youth with disabilities. So far, efforts have been made to align these activities with projects specific to improving behavior and dropout prevention.

By supplementing existing programs with new research, Nebraska is working towards developing comprehensive, evidence-based solutions to help ensure students with disabilities finish school.

For more information, contact Linda Foley at linda.foley@nebraska.gov

Persistence Pays Off: Getting Students Back One-By-One

By Nancy Early, Special Education Supervisor for Monticello Schools, Arkansas

Josh is an 18-year old high school student living in a trailer with his parents, older brother, and pit bull, in Monticello, Arkansas. When he stopped coming to school, his teachers were naturally concerned, but after visiting him in his home several times to try to get him to return, they finally decided there was nothing else they could do. I felt there must be *something* we could do. We couldn't lose this student so close to his graduation. I went back to his house with the school social worker and we sat down with Josh and his mother. I asked Josh why he didn't want to return to school. He admitted that he was being bullied because of his severe speech deficit. He also felt that he had a poor relationship with his teacher and the paraprofessional. Given these situations, it was understandable that Josh didn't want to come back to school. Who would want to be in a setting where they were being bullied by their peers and didn't get along with the adults? I asked if he would give the alternative school a try...it was just two blocks from his house and he would be able to walk there every day. To our surprise, Josh agreed to try it out.

He was the first one at the door that Monday...and the next day...and the next. It turned out the breakfast provided at the school was his biggest motivation for being there. On Mondays he turned up even earlier, having barely eaten for the entire weekend. It has been four months since his first day, and Josh hasn't missed a day yet! The teachers at the alternative school report he is doing well and is making progress towards graduation. This story shows if there is a legitimate reason for a student to not want to be in school, sometimes we need to find alternatives for them. It is our duty as educators to do everything we can to help students succeed - and that's why we need to be persistent with getting students who have dropped out to return to school!

Reentry News From Around The Country

[The Pharr-San Juan-Alamo dropout recovery campus helps](#)

students who will struggle to pass end-of-year exams or earn credits for high school graduation.

The Monitor, 11/15/12

Instructors at Columbia Basin College in Washington help students graduate from The High School Academy.

KEPRTV.com, 11/26/12

Carleton Project in Maine keeps potential dropouts on track to graduate.

Bangor Daily News, 11/28/12

Partnership between the city and Los Angeles Unified School District aims to reconnect youth to school or work.

Los Angeles Times, 11/29/12

Rafael Rivera Opportunity Center in Las Vegas helps out-of-school youth complete their diplomas and helps graduates find jobs.

KLAS-TV 8 News NOW, 11/29/12

Students graduate from Second Chance Youth Building Alternatives program in Bangor, Maine.

Bangor Daily News, 12/17/12

Partnership in Harrison School District underway to get Colorado youth back in school.

Colorado Springs Gazette, 02/27/13

Michigan Youth ChalleNge Academy Ready to Embrace Dropouts

Battle Creek Enquirer, 03/13/13

City of Winston-Salem gets YouthBuild grant to give dropouts a second chance.

Winston-Salem Journal, 03/26/13

Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools re-enrolls dropouts in Forsyth Academy of Continuing Education.

Winston-Salem Journal, 03/27/13

Upcoming Events

Conferences

[CEC 2013 Convention & Expo](#)

April 3-6, 2013, San Antonio, Texas

[2013 Best Practices Forum on Dropout Prevention](#)

April 14 - 17, 2013, Kansas City, Missouri

[Urban Transition Conference 2013](#)

April 24 - 25, 2013, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

[34th Annual LRP's National Institute on Legal Issues of Educating Individuals with Disabilities](#)

April 28 - May 1, 2013, Long Beach California

[Division on Career Development and Transition 17th International Conference 2013](#)

November 13 - 16, 2013, Williamsburg, Virginia

Resource Center

[Aligning Competencies to Rigorous Standards for Off-Track Youth \(December, 2012\)](#)

[Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School \(August 2012\)](#) Â Â

[The Importance of Being in School \(May, 2012\)](#)

[Building a Grad Nation, 2012 Annual Update \(March, 2012\)](#)

[Opportunity Road: The Promise and Challenge of America's Forgotten Youth \(January, 2012\)](#)

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