



Big IDEAs

Dropout
Prevention
Strategies

New Hampshire Achievement for Dropout Prevention and Excellence (APEX)

Purpose

Achievement for Dropout Prevention and Excellence (APEX) is a dropout prevention model that is based on the philosophy that schools can play a significant role in lowering the dropout rate, and that all students should have the individual supports they need to succeed. The APEX model was first tested and implemented in 2002 as a three-year project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The model was a collaboration between the New Hampshire State Department of Education, the University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability, and the Alliance for Community Supports, Inc.

The APEX model is designed to (1) significantly reduce high school dropout rates; (2) implement a schoolwide positive behavioral system in the high schools that lowers suspension and expulsion rates; (3) provide an intensive and individualized school-to-career service to current students who have dropped out of school or to students who are considered to be at great risk of failure resulting in a significant number of those students successfully completing high school, and (4) strengthen the state education agency's capacity to implement these proven dropout prevention strategies through comprehensive and high-quality professional development and technical assistance.

Major Components

At its core, the New Hampshire APEX model combines two evidence-based practices: *Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS)* and *Rehabilitation for Empowerment, Natural Supports, Education*

and Work (RENEW). Both PBIS and RENEW are based on the belief that students who are on a path to failure will likely drop out unless their schools provide focused, organized interventions that are preventative and flexible.

PBIS focuses on teaching and supporting positive student behaviors in schools. Although PBIS has been used mostly in elementary and middle schools, some high schools have been implementing PBIS with positive results, such as significant decreases in student behavioral problems and absences. The PBIS model is based on three principles: (1) the development and implementation of PBIS is conducted by teams with stakeholder representation that uses a democratic process; (2) decisions and implementation are data driven, and (3) the mission of the school must be to promote an environment where all students are expected to succeed.

PBIS strategies include: (1) objectively analyzing the school's current behavioral incidents; (2) creating clear behavioral expectations for students; (3) developing a data collection and analysis system to be used by school teams, and (4) creating strategies for developing and teaching positive behavioral expectations through the school.

RENEW provides services for students needing the greatest support to stay in school. RENEW provides intensive individual support for students with emotional and behavioral challenges. First developed in 1996, RENEW is provided by the Alliance for Community Supports, Inc., and has shown to be particularly effective in helping students graduate high school through a community-based support system that provides educational and work opportunities. RENEW goals include high school completion, employment,

individualized resource development, and achievement for students with serious emotional and behavioral disabilities. RENEW has attained an impressive 95% high school completion rate with the first cohort of students.

During the three years of implementation at two New Hampshire high schools, Manchester 's Central High School and Franklin High School , the APEX model has resulted in major systems changes. APEX model developers report that both high schools have: (1) re-designed and enhanced their schoolwide discipline referral systems and methods of data collection on students and discipline problems; (2) developed their schoolwide universal teams and targeted teams; (3) received more than 20 days of training by national experts in PBIS systems, data-driven decision-making, PBIS teaching strategies, and team operation; (4) have developed schoolwide behavioral expectations and rolled out the PBIS models to all of the faculty; (5) worked with RENEW at each high school and have served 74 students who would otherwise have failed or dropped out of school; (6) recruited and provided leadership training to more than 80 students on bullying or discipline issues, (7) created, with student leaders at each school, a system for collecting data on bullying issues and school climate, and (8) worked with the New Hampshire Federation of Families and the CARE-NH Systems of Care project to provide "wraparound" facilitation classes to individuals across the state.

APEX also provided intensive, individualized school-to-career case management services through RENEW to 51 students. A majority of these students have received credits required for graduation, several have graduated and many have secured jobs or plan to enroll in college.

Cost

Program cost is estimated at approximately \$5,100 per student over the course of a school year. Developers compare this cost to alternative educational settings that can cost \$8,000, or residential placement or hospitalization that can cost a school district

an average of \$60,000 per student during the school year.

Evidence of Effectiveness

At Franklin High School, the annual dropout rate has gone from 16.8% in the 2000-01 school year to less than 3% in 2004-05. While the dropout rate was already decreasing before APEX implementation, the decrease continued during APEX. Franklin High School also lowered its disciplinary action rates with a 30% reduction in the number of student suspension days over the same time period. The cumulative dropout rate at Central High School has remained at 37% during this same period of implementation, but APEX developers point out that systemic change in a larger context takes longer. Another confounder is Central High School's major construction and renovation project that has been underway during the APEX implementation period.

After three years of implementation and evaluation, the APEX model showed such promising results for students that APEX II received additional funding from the U.S. Department of Education. As with APEX, APEX II combines both strategies: PBIS and RENEW. This new funding enables developers to expand the program to 11 high schools in New Hampshire and their corresponding middle schools.

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