



# Big IDEAs

## Dropout Prevention Strategies

### Iowa Behavioral Alliance

#### Purpose

The Iowa Behavioral Alliance is a collaborative effort of Drake University, Iowa State University (including Iowa 4-H Youth Development of the University Extension, faculty from special education and early childhood education and the Research Institute for Studies in Education), and the Iowa Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health.

#### Major Components

A Coordinating Council consisting of the partners and other collaborators including the Iowa Parent Training and Information Center (PTI), Child Health Specialty Clinic, Area Education Directors of Special Education, the Urban Education Network and representatives from other child-focused agencies meets monthly to provide guidance and direction for the entire program.

There are three components of the Iowa Behavioral Alliance: positive behavior support, mental health initiatives and dropout prevention. Three subgroups (the PBS Leadership Team, the Mental Health Advisory Council and the Dropout Prevention Advisory Group) meet bimonthly to provide direction and input in relation to the work of these committees.

The work of the Alliance is funded through a five-year grant from the Iowa Department of Education. Work of the Alliance is supported through additional expertise from sources such as the Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports at the University of Oregon.

Dropout Prevention is one of three elements of the Iowa Behavioral Alliance. The work of this component is guided by the Dropout Prevention Advisory Group (DPAG). The

DPAG's work focuses on dropout prevention programs especially in relation to students considered as having behavioral disorders, mental health issues or significant social, emotional or behavioral needs.

The outcomes for the Dropout Prevention element are:

- Identification of existing programs and the implementation of new dropout prevention approaches based on best practice.
- Reduction of dropout rates for students in Iowa (the Dropout Prevention Advisory Group will use the formulae of the DE in their definition of what constitutes dropout).
- Reduction of absenteeism, office referrals, suspensions and expulsions.
- Improvement in grades in at-risk groups at middle and high school PBS sites.
- Increased participation in extracurricular activities in at-risk groups at middle and high school PBS sites.
- Increased awareness of the availability of alternative school resources.
- A state profile of promising practices in dropout prevention for students with behavioral disorders. This document will be published and disseminated to educators and human service providers and families.

In order to achieve these outcomes, the activities in this area are organized in five phases.

1. Identify and prioritize needs based on data analysis

2. Establish a resource network of sites with proven practices
3. Identify policies that contribute to students dropping out and recommend areas for policy development
4. Collaborate with DE and existing agencies for a unified approach to dropout issues
5. Develop a performance measurement system to determine effectiveness

The Alliance is currently focusing its efforts on Phase 1 and Phase 2. There is a process for nominating worthy sites/schools who are implementing best practices which have made a difference in dropout rates. Iowa Alternative School Coordinators, Decategorization Coordinators, and Juvenile Court Officers have been contacted so far. To date, 12 sites have been nominated and the Alliance is following up through structured interviews with administrators and key implementers at these sites. Individuals are invited to self-nominate or to nominate a site/school which has successful programs and practices that help students (especially students with behavioral/emotional needs) graduate. After a site is nominated the Alliance will contact the site to learn more about its work and determine if the site is open to ways for its work to be shared with other schools and programs.

Program Profiles is a searchable database containing descriptions of dropout prevention programs in Iowa. These programs have been nominated by either the Iowa Alternative School Coordinators, the contact people in each of the state's Decategorization Boards, or the Chief Juvenile Court Officers. Sites could be self-nominated as well.

Each program has several distinctive features that you may wish to learn more about or to see in action. The 16 Program Features section was based on "The Keys to Success in Dropout Prevention" developed by the National Dropout Prevention Center, Iowa Department of Education and modified by the Iowa Dropout Prevention Advisory Group. All of the program directors in this database have indicated they would welcome visitors.

#### Program Features are

1. Outcome data system
2. School-based enterprise
3. Innovative strategies for promoting and measuring social/emotional, physical well-being
4. Family outreach
5. Community collaboration
6. Aggressive outreach
7. Learning styles/multiple intelligences
8. Positive approaches to discipline
9. Personalized planning
10. Promotes caring relationships
11. Student voice and leadership
12. Non-traditional timelines
13. Innovative academic strategies
14. Mentoring/tutoring
15. Reducing absenteeism
16. Other innovative strategies

Information taken from

<http://www.educ.drake.edu/rc/alliance.html>

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