



APEX II: Project Description

The New Hampshire Department of Education is implementing a three-year (2006-2008) dropout prevention grant, called APEX II (Achievement in Dropout Prevention and Excellence). This project builds on a previous dropout prevention and school improvement program (APEX I) implemented in 2002-2005 in Franklin and Manchester, NH. APEX I demonstrated the promise of strategically combining three powerful school improvement models to reduce dropout rates, improve individual student success, and to improve overall school climate. These models are:

1. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a systemic, data driven behavioral support and improvement process.
2. Rehabilitation, Empowerment, Natural supports, Education and Work (RENEW), an intensive individualized school-to-career service for the most at risk students, and
3. A Student Leadership initiative, including a student-led needs assessment and action project program where students work with PBIS Universal Teams to assess and improve school climate, safety, and learning.

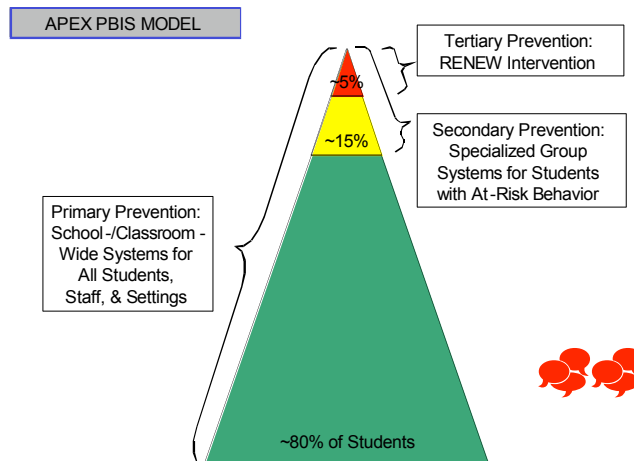
From April, 2006, through December 2008, APEX II staff members will work with students, families, teachers, and administrators at 10 high schools and their sending middle schools.

There are three levels of support for the schools in this project:

- **School-wide:** At this level, the APEX staff work with the schools to evaluate and redesign their discipline systems using the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports model (PBIS). Staff members work with the schools to form Leadership Teams (Universal Teams), assess the school's current behavior issues, redesign the school's behavioral expectations, sharpen the school's data collection and retrieval system, and design and implement school-wide interventions that benefit every student in the school. In selected schools, the leadership efforts incorporate student-led data collection and student leadership activities with diverse representation of "opinion-leaders" as part of the school's Universal PBS team.
- **Targeted:** A team of specialists and administrators focus on students who exhibit challenging behaviors and who are at risk for school failure due to academic, social or behavioral issues. The goal of this team is to design interventions for the student or group of students based on a functional and contextual assessment. These "function-based" interventions have been proven effective to reduce problem behaviors and the associated negative consequences. The APEX II staff also work with middle school staffs to identify and help specific at-risk 8th grade students to transition to the 9th grade in a positive way.
- **Individual Student:** RENEW facilitators employed by the APEX project work with staff members at each high school and specialists from community-based organizations to identify individual students who are struggling to complete their program or who have already dropped out. Each student develops an individualized plan using an evidence-based practice called RENEW (Rehabilitation, Empowerment, Natural supports, Education and Work), and individualized learning plans that suit the student's abilities, interests, and needs.

Student Leadership The APEX project includes the development and support of a student leadership team (in schools that have adopted PBIS) so that information about school culture and climate is gathered from a variety of perspectives, and so that the voices of all students

are part of the school-wide Universal implementation process. The teams develop better communication and understanding between students, faculty, administrators, and other stakeholders. Faculty and students from New England College through Main Street Academix, Inc. in Henniker, NH provide support to the student leadership teams.



The Rational for APEX

Research tells us that students with certain characteristics are more likely to dropout of school. These student characteristics include low socio-economic status (Rumberger, 1987; 1995), educational barriers (Wagner, 1991; 1995), membership in certain ethnic or minority groups (Rumberger, 2001), or a history of abuse, neglect or substance abuse in the family (Alexander, et al., 1997; Kortering, et al., 1992). The research also tells us that some high schools have higher dropout rates than other high schools when controlling for these student-related factors (Rutter, 1979; Merritt, 1983). High schools with better student outcomes tend to have well- organized, consistent and positive systems of discipline and tend to have a philosophy that all students should be successful (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Gottfredson, Gottfredson & Hybl, 1993; Nelson, 1996; Rumberger, 2001). The New Hampshire APEX model is based on this research and the philosophy that school factors can contribute to lowering dropout rates, and that all students should have the individualized supports necessary to succeed.

The NH APEX model is designed to achieve five outcomes: 1) to significantly reduce the high school’s drop out rate, 2) to implement a school-wide positive behavioral system in the high schools in order to reduce the suspension and expulsion rates, including meaningful student and parent involvement in decision-making, 3) to provide an intensive and individualized school-to-career service for current dropouts or students at great risk of failure so that a significant majority of those students successfully complete high school, 4) to develop a transition process for at-risk 8th graders so they have a successful transition to 9th grade, and, 5) to expand the state’s capacity to implement these proven dropout prevention strategies by creating comprehensive and high-quality professional development and technical assistance capacities through multiple venues and training levels

Collaboration with Other Initiatives

The New Hampshire Department of Education has embraced PBS as a high priority strategy for school improvement, and has worked with Rivier College and SERESC to create the New Hampshire Center for Effective Behavioral Interventions and Supports (NH-CEBIS). APEX has joined resources with NH-CEBIS to provide training for all levels of PBS implementation, and to ensure that the APEX II schools have access to strong technical assistance, data collection and evaluation services. In addition, APEX II is collaborating with

the NH Systems of Care in Education initiative and the state's Youth Vision Committee. The APEX II staff is working with the NH Federation of Families and NAMI-NH to ensure parent participation at the individual, school and community levels. The Family Resource Network at the New Hampshire State Library is also part of APEX II, obtaining and providing resources and information on PBIS, dropout prevention, disability and education, and secondary transition.

APEX Contacts:

- APEX II Project Director: Robert Wells, Ph.D., NH Department of Education. (603) 271-1536, rwells@ed.state.nh.us
- McKenzie Harrington, APEX II Program Specialist, NH Department of Education. (603)-271-3739, mharrington@ed.state.nh.us
- Project Co-Director: JoAnne Malloy, UNH/ Institute on Disability. (603) 228-2084, jmmalloy@aol.com
- Project Co-Director: Kathleen Abate, Alliance for Community Supports, Inc. (603) 628-7681, gsffcmh@aol.com

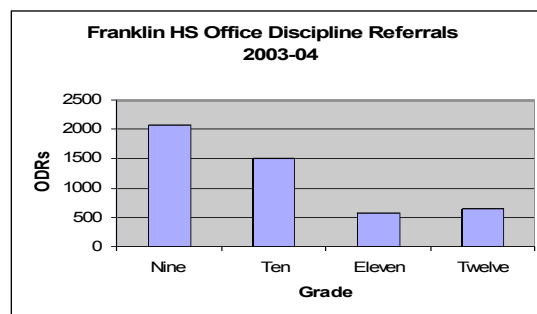
Websites and Resources:

- State of New Hampshire Department of Education: www.ed.state.nh.us
- Institute on Disability: www.iod.unh.edu
- Alliance for Community Supports: www.allianceforcommunitysupports.com
- The National High School Center: www.betterhighschools.org
- International Association of Positive Behavioral Support: www.apbs.org
- NH-Center for Effective Behavioral Interventions and Supports- CEBIS: www.nhcebis.seresc.net
- Main Street Academix: <http://www.msanh.com/>
- National Secondary Transition TA Center: www.nstta.c.org
- National Post-School Outcomes Center: www.psocenter.org
- National Dropout Center for Students with Disabilities: www.ndpc-sd.org
- Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS): www.pbis.org
- NH Family Resource Connection Library: www.nh.gov/nhsl/frc/catalog.html
- Council for Exceptional Children: www.cec.sped.org
- Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health: portlandrtc@pdx.edu

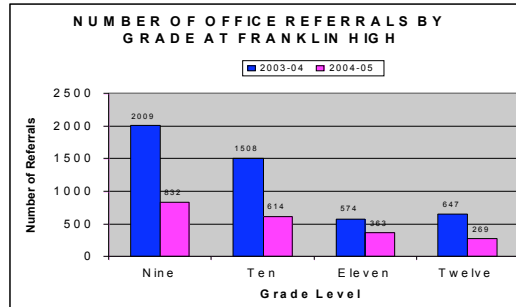
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CASE EXAMPLE: Franklin High School

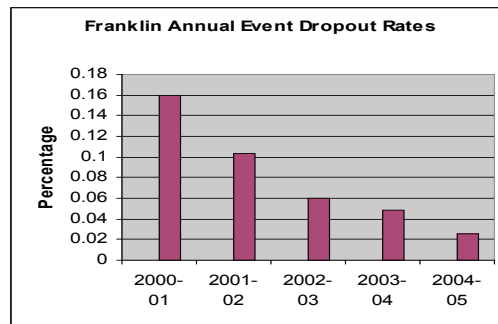
Franklin's Team looked at the data and decided that the primary problems emanated from students in the 9th and 10th grades:



As a result of using data, the Franklin team decided to implement 9th grade advisories and an on-time to class behavior expectation roll out beginning in the 2004-2005 school year. The results show significant reductions in office discipline problems from the 2003-04 to the 2004-05 school years:



APEX worked with the Franklin HS staff beginning in the fall of 2002 through June 2005. In addition to using PBIS, Franklin HS started an alternative school in 2003-04. Here are the results for Franklin HS Dropout Rates:



The results have been sustained for 2 years after the APEX project ended.