

National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD)
“The Impact of Policies and Procedures
on Dropout and School Completion”
Dr. Loujeania Williams Bost & Dr. Matthew Klare
October 16, 2007

Dr. Loujeania Bost: Thank you, Dick.

Good afternoon to all of our East Coast listeners, and good morning still to our Mountain, Plains and those in the Western time zones.

Students with disabilities are twice as likely as their non-disabled peers to drop out of school. According to the data reported by the US Department of Education’s Office of Special Ed Programs, school completion rates for students with disabilities are just over 68 percent, and the dropout rate is approximately 28 percent.

For those students who drop out, [they just] often experience limited opportunities in employment, college attendance, and quality of life.

Multiple factors influence school completion within schools, including state and district internal policies and practices. Effective policies and procedures play a role in that. Effective policies consist of clear, well-defined statements that guide district administrators and other personnel in developing guidelines to ensure that district missions, goals and practices are carried out with efficiency and parity.

Good policies consider ramifications of interrelated policies and can help eliminate confusion and promote school completion. However, in today’s changing landscape of reform and accountability, policies can become out of date, unclear, or even contrary to the way in which the school district is operating.

In today’s teleseminar, we are going to provide a context in school policies and school completion as they impact upon dropout prevention and helping students stay in school. We’re also going to provide some types of policies that influence school completion, and examples from the fields as to how that influence is played out.

And, finally, we are going to provide some proposed strategies and recommendations that we have encountered in our work over the last four years at the National Center from both a state and a federal level, as well as the local districts that we’ve been in contact with.

Dick, I believe at this time, you have some response from our first polling question?

Dick: Well, Loujeania, what we’ll do here is let’s—before you really get going much farther here let’s ask the next question. And the question is what type of agency do the majority of the participants at your site today represent? Once again, you’re going to use your telephone keypad.

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And the question again is what type of agency do the majority of the participants at your site today represent? If it's a Federal Agency, press 1. If it's a State Education Agency, press 2, Local Education Agency, press 3. And if it's Other, go ahead and press 4.

So, once again, if you represent a Federal Agency, press 1; an SEA, press 2; LEA, press 3, and if you represent another, go ahead and press number 4.

And while those numbers are coming in—it looks like they're coming in a little--rather slowly. We'll just wait a few more moments.

Loujeania, I'm going to pass this over to you.

Dr. Loujeania Bost: Okay. We're going to continue on now with what is needed to support school completion initiatives?

From our work, we have learned that strategic planning about why students are dropping out. What are we going to do about it? How are we going to provide resources? What approaches will we take? What level of programming will we engage in at the state and at the local level?

We know also that clear definitions are required, definitions related to what is a dropout? What's a graduate? And those gray areas in between that's conditional **[audio skip]** dependent upon the diploma options that is awarded by the state.

We also know that adequate resources are required to enable to implement our school completion initiatives. We know that professional development and ongoing technical assistance and training is important, not only to create an awareness, but also to build local capacity to engage in activities that will support and maintain efforts over time.

And we know that accountability, both concrete and reasonable goals and measures and performance indicators, are necessary so that states and locals can gauge where they are now, where they need to be, and the course of—and when they arrive at their designated targets. We also know that clear and sensible policies and procedures will be required in order to effectuate these initiatives.

Let's look a minute at the role of policies and procedures in school completion, or in schools in general. They provide a structure for governance of school processes and, as such, they guide program development. At the state level, they ensure consistency across districts. At the state and local level, they also ensure consistency of implementation over time. And at a local level, they ensure consistency of implementation across individuals.

We also know that there are—policies impact at different levels. We have our governmental levels looking at our federal and our state policies. In our laws and

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regulations with No Child Left Behind, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, we also know that our state statutes can either provide additional layers of policy beyond NCLB and IDEA.

We also know that definitions and procedures and the implementation of those definitions and procedures require a policy interpretation at the governmental or the state level. And we know that accountability in terms of monitoring in school, improvement and rewards and sanctions, also play a major role in the types of policies that are developed around this area. And at the local level, at the level of school where students are most impacted, we know that district and school board policies and the implementation of those policies play an important role. And school-wide initiatives play an important role in that area in terms of who gets to be included in these initiatives, and who does not, and looking at school and district procedures, and how they play out in terms of attendance, in terms of behavior, in terms of curriculum and instruction, and those major areas that impact dropout prevention.

We also look at—there’s a number of issues that come into play at the state and federal levels, and looking at an alignment of definitions and measures in terms of getting consistency across the federal level at the definition of graduate, and also graduation policies and procedures. There are a number of things, and a number of efforts that are being undertaken at the federal level, both by No Child Left Behind, as well as IDEA, and the National Governors Association, to get at a more consistent definition about dropout and calculating dropout and graduation rates.

Accountability for progress towards targets are also issues at the federal level. What is considered to be a rigorous target in this area, and what is not so rigorous? And as we’ve learned most of that is state specific. But there are also issues to be considered as you’re making policy. The program support and the allocation for fund and technical assistance. What is the role of the—what issues are around what avenue of technical assistance? How much will the programs cost? What type of funding, and the level of funding that’s required to actually bring these type of initiatives to scale, and the availability of highly qualified personnel, which plays an important role in the issues at the state and federal level. And at the local level, looking at establishing and disseminating clear policies and procedures, making sure that stakeholders at all levels—the community, the parents, the students, the professional staff as well as the administrative—have a clear meaning about what the policies say and what the ramifications of those policies are as it relates to being able to stay in school, progress in school, and graduate with a diploma.

Securing stakeholder buy-in for new ideas and initiatives is also issues at the local level that have to be addressed that sometimes will result in policy. And the availability of resources to support new programs and initiatives. Whenever a new program or initiative is put into place, often it will require restructuring and realignment of resources as they currently exist.

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So, we begin to ask ourselves, why do policies matter anyway regarding school completion? We began to look at the pathway to school dropout to get a sense of why is all of this important anyway? The things that we have learned is that dropout is not an isolated event. The process begins early, often as early as elementary school, and continues throughout high school until the event of school departure finally occurs.

We know that elevated dropout rates reported among some children who were rated highly aggressive by their first grade teacher. So, you've got indicators at the first grade level. You've got—dropouts could be distinguished more from graduates with about a 66 percent accuracy by the third grade using attendance data alone. And also that identification of dropouts could be accomplished with reasonable accuracy based on a review of school performance, i.e. behavior, attendance, and academics, during the elementary years.

We also began to just look at the trend beyond third grade, and fourth grade, where students who had repeated grades as early as K to 4 were five times more likely to drop out of school than students who had not been retained.

The four strongest predictors—we look at middle school predictors of dropout. The four strongest predictors determined by the end of the sixth grade were poor attendance, poor behavior, failing Math, and failing English. We began to look at a pattern moving forth in the middle school, which constitutes a need to look at those type of policies and procedures that are related to those strong predictors of dropping out and completing school later on. And we know from that same body of research from Balfanz and Herzog in 2005 and 2006, that sixth graders who do not attend school regularly, who receive poor behavior marks, or fail Math or English, have only about a 10 percent chance of graduating on time, and a 20 percent chance of graduating one year later.

Looking at those predictors individually, students with poor attendance in middle school have about a 14 percent chance of graduating on time or with one extra year. Students who had bad behavior records—17 percent on time graduation. Those students who had failed Math had about a 21 percent on time graduation rate. And those students who had failed English alone had about a 16 percent on time graduation rate.

We look at those middle school predictors as they continue now, with students who repeated middle school grades, have about eleven times more likely that they will drop out of school than those students who had not repeated. Now, we have moved from early elementary school into middle grades. And that likeliness has moved now from five times to eleven times more likely with repeat.

A student who is retained two grades increased their risk of dropping out in high school by about 90 percent. And we also know that transition between schools are critical times for at-risk students.

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We move into those high school predictors of dropout. Those students who enter ninth grade two or more grade levels behind their peers have only a one in two chance of being promoted to the tenth grade on time. And in ninth grade, retention is the biggest predictor of dropout. And the biggest falloff for all students will occur between the ninth and the tenth grades. We also see emerging trends of increased dropout in grades 11 and grades 12.

I think now we're pausing for our next polling question, or our polling results. Dick?

Dick: All right. Thank you. And once again, you're going to use your telephone keypad. The question is how often are district or school policies reviewed and revised as necessary? And if it's every year, press the number 1; every two years, press 2; every three years, press 3; and whenever the laws or regulations are changed, press the number 4; and if you don't know, press number 5.

Again, how often are district or school policies reviewed and revised as necessary? If it's every year, press 1; every two years, press 2; every five years, press 3; and whenever the laws or regulations are changed, press number 4; and if you don't know, please press number 5.

You may go ahead now, and, Loujeania, back to you.

Dr. Loujeania Bost: Okay. So, how do we influence dropout? There's a number of ways that school personnel influence dropout. We are responsible. Oftentimes, you will see dropout initiatives that speak only to fix children, as if the children themselves are broken and they will bear the sole responsibility of dropping out of school. But we know that we, as educators, are responsible, too, with the school policies and procedures that we have in place—for discipline, for grading, for standards, for retention, for structuring class assignment.

Oftentimes, we will find our least able teachers assigned to teach our least able students. We also know that there're issues about not preparing students appropriately for natural transitions in school, as well as those transitions for students with disabilities from high school into adult life. We know that course content and instruction as it relates to boredom and curriculum quality play a large role in reasons that students have identified that led to their decision to leave school. And we also know that climate and relationships in terms of the connectedness of which students feel that they're connected to their school, or to individuals within their school, also play a larger role in school completion.

All of these areas bear some response to policies and procedures.

And in this next segment, we're going to talk specifically about some of the major policies that influence school completion, provide some examples from the field,

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and where also to the extent that research has allowed it to provide some findings from the research relative to these individual areas.

Dick, do you have any polling responses for us now?

Dick: No. There's going to be three more polling questions, and I'll have responses to those three.

Dr. Loujeania Bost: Okay. We're going to move on then.

So, what are the types of policies and procedures that affect school completion?

We know that there are attendance related policies and procedures that affect student completion. There are the discipline related policies and procedures. There're some that are related to academics that affects school completion in terms of credit accrual, and the use of evidence, best practices and grade retention.

We also know that school exiting related policies in terms of diploma options and credit accrual also impact school completion. We know that definitions themselves of dropout and graduation as well as transfers of students' records also play an important role in those policies.

So, now we are going to begin to talk about specifically, some of those policies. We're not going to attempt, by any means, to address all of the policies that relate to school completion, or we would be here probably until this time tomorrow. But what we are going to do is we're going to hit some of the major ones that line up with research and to begin to look at some of those examples of how those policies actually impact both positively and negatively on the area of school completion.

And we're going to begin at the first of the alphabet. We're going to begin with attendance. The goal of most of the attendance policies is to promote consistent school attendance. School attendance serves as a key indicator of adequate yearly progress at the middle school level under No Child Left Behind. But we also know that regular school attendance is paramount in acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary with moving from grade to grade and passing course work.

How does that link to dropout? Simply. Approximately 30 percent of high schoolers, 20 percent of middle schoolers, and 14 percent of elementary students, are chronically truant within the course of a year. High absenteeism and retention are serious risk factors for dropping out that can be monitored by schools, and 80 percent of dropouts were chronically truant during the year in which they dropped out of school.

So, we see that there is a consistent and direct link between school attendance and dropping out, and therefore policy would impact in that area.

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Looking at the research findings in the area of attendance, in this area, have concluded that consistent school attendance has a high positive correlation to academic success and school completion, that students learn best when they attend school every day. When students miss school, they miss important lessons, and essential skills they need for academic success. Good attendance establishes a pattern of responsibility and commitment that will serve students throughout their lifetimes including college and the workplace.

We know that effective—the research on effective attendance policies that says that effective attendance policies are clearly written, publicized and communicated to all staff, students and parents. They clearly distinguish between the difference between excused and unexcused absences. And they are aligned with the district’s policies and goals.

We also know that they avoid the use of suspensions and expulsions, for truancy, and instead consider less severe consequences such as community service or in-school detentions.

We know that they contain effective reporting, recording and monitoring processes. And they investigate the various computerized attendance tracking systems that are currently available that would make monitoring attendance more efficient.

We know that they include full family involvement with parent notification or frequent home visits whenever multiple unexcused absences occur, and we know that they clearly specify how rewards and incentives programs will be used. And they develop two-way contracts amongst students, administrators, teachers, and families that delineate standards of performance of the students, services the school will provide or changes the school will make.

We know from the research that some components of successful programs include special attention to health and special education needs. And they use data to drive decision-making. They involve community and business. And they focus on school transition years. They include public awareness activities so that not only the school but the community at large know that regular school attendance is an important factor, and an important feature of what the school is all about. And they include meaningful parental involvement, and that’s parental involvement from the onset of developing attendance intervention programs or prevention programs, not just whenever they are issues within the school, and the parent has to be called in order to appear in a court, or in other types of punitive measures.

They provide a balanced continuum of incentives and sanctions. Oftentimes, we will find that the incentives and sanctions will prohibit. We find that sanctions occur, but the incentives are less forthcoming. We also know that they emphasize early warning and intensive interventions. And they provide a

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continuum of strategies that goes from rewards up until the knocks on the doors. They provide alternative options to courts.

There are a number of positive and negative consequences that move along with attendance policies. One of the opportunities that we had was to conduct focused forums with the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative this year, which is a body of over 120 urban school districts of varying sizes across the country, which happens to be one of our long-term partners with our Education Development Center.

And in the focused forums for those schools—schools were asked to identify the positive and the negative aspects of programs that were going on within their particular schools or districts that they believed that had a positive impact upon their policies and procedures within the areas of attendance, within the areas of discipline, within the areas of academics and within the areas of school exit. From the attendance related practices, these are some of the things that they identified that were effective—incentive programs for good and improved attendance.

One of the things that we found in our travels is that they have programs that reward perfect attendance, but for many students who have attendance issues, there's a distance between perfect and where they are now, that significant improvement in attendance is also a critical feature that need to be rewarded within the context of attendance programs, that early warning systems were in place to monitor the attendance after the second occurrence.

But we also know that from the research from effective schools, and also from the number of researches that have been looking at the notion of attendance and dropout that intervention is best when it occurs after even one occurrence of attendance. That there should be a process in place within our programs that takes into account when the student is absent even one day. That extended day programs with students who have excessive absences and tardiness would provide an opportunity for that, for students to make up work, and to catch up the work that they had missed. And also that family resource centers within their schools had played a positive role in helping to improve attendance because, oftentimes, students will stay out of school either because they themselves are sick, or because a family member is sick. And if those resources like the family health clinics and whatnot, are available within the schools, and also some schools will have daycares that will assist in accommodating particularly paying parents who may be absent because of the lack of daycare.

On some of the negative sides, they looked at suspending youth for being tardy or absent, which we call in our work “Killer Policy Number 2,” whereby if you have a truant child who comes to school only to be suspended again because he was out of school three days, we begin to wonder about the efficacy of such policies that incur those type of consequences. Absenteeism, linked to credit accrual, which is one of the major factors that have been identified by schools

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themselves as creating an increasing struggle with juniors and seniors in dropping out, is that they find themselves over-aged in the eleventh grade with less credit than they need to have. And, on top of that, you have, “It is March. For one reason or the other, I have already missed my six days that I cannot go over in order to get credits for the course. Though I’m passing this course, because of my absences, I can’t get the credit.”

And so as a result of that, students—they get discouraged. “It’s March. I have to be here until June. I’m out of here now.” And those are the types of negative things related to credit accrual and absenteeism.

Those punitive non-proactive actions by parents due to truancy, lack of early warning systems, a lack of monitoring systems, that bring the parent into the situation only at the critical point. We read policies that say, on the ninth day of unexcused absences, parents will be notified. But in that policy, it’s not where the parents are notified on day one in a lot of cases.

We also began to look at, in the area of attendance, some of the positive areas of rewarding good and perfect attendance, of having senior mentors for truant freshmen. Parents must telephone if a student will be out. And then there’re the random calls to parents of absent students.

There’s also that caution that schools have told us about calling and leaving the message on the parent’s answering machine, when the truant student gets home and deletes the message. So, it’s the schools who need to look beyond that for other avenues of parent notification.

We also found some negative consequences that were going on within some of those schools, like locking the school doors to keep out latecomers, and suspending students who were often truant.

I remember being in a session about a year ago when a principal stood up and said, “Well, Dr. Bost, school starts and the first bell is at 7:35. If they’re not in their seats by 7:50, we lock all our doors.” And you begin to think, “Well, now, and don’t be proud about saying that because you really need to rethink that. Locking doors except for the main office door so that you can appropriately record attendance and get the pass, and make sure that tardiness if sufficiently dealt with is one thing, but then you have taken away the opportunity for the student to be in any classes.”

And many of the school policies do not differentiate between what constitutes an absence from the whole day and an absence from particular classes. So, those are some of the areas with attendance that we really needed to be concerned with.

Now, we’re going to move on now to the big discipline policy.

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The overall goal of discipline, of school disciplinary policies is to maintain an orderly environment so that teachers are better able to teach and students are better able to learn. And we all know the strong link between disciplinary actions and how they serve to push students out of school.

We know that repeated use of exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspensions, have been identified as one of the major factors contributing to dropout. We also know from the research that elevated dropout rates reported among children who were rated as highly aggressive by their first grade teachers. We know that sixth graders who do not attend school regularly receive poor behavior marks or fail Math or English, have only about a 10 percent chance of graduating on time, and a 20 percent chance of graduating one year later. We know that the research findings in this area have concluded that student disorder interrupts not only school safety, but decreases student achievement as well. And when conduct is not confronted, misbehaving students are likely to infer that such behavior will be tolerated.

We also know that some school discipline practices promote anti-social behavior. And in many schools—and many school practices contribute to the development of anti-social behavior, and the potential for violence.

These factors are all amenable to change in a positive and proactive manner as we have seen from some of the recent work that has been done in schools with school-wide positive behavior, support initiatives, and the like.

We also know that school personnel have a long history of applying simple and unproven solutions to complex behavior problems. For example, the office discipline referrals and suspensions, rather than focusing on the administrative—eminent administrative issues and teaching the management practices that either contribute to or reduce disciplinary issues.

Our example in this policy is we're going to talk about the zero tolerance policy, which has both positive and negative effects.

In the positive range, it's sending a clear message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated in school and for students with disabilities, those behaviors of drug and firearms and those zero tolerance policies that are beneficial in as it assist in protecting the school or the student environment. But we also know that often, zero tolerance is taken to a whole different level and serves as a push-out effect for students.

Some of those zero tolerance policies go beyond that required by the state and federal law. And they become things of which I will not tolerate in my building.

We also know that some of the alternative solutions that the research have identified, to the zero tolerance, is a shift in discipline from reducing negative incidents to promoting some positive functioning within the classroom and within

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the school, and to provide guidance for desired behaviors as opposed to merely enforcing punitive consequences.

Within our collective works of gathering positive and negative aspects of policies again from our collaborative partners, and with the direct technical assistance schools that we've been working in, some of the negatives that they have identified with some of their policies is that there's a disparate implementation of zero tolerance policies.

Literature and research bears out that certain types of students are more apt to experience harsher discipline for the same offense than some other types of students.

We also know that punishment, suspension for absenteeism and tardiness, only serves to contribute to our dropout rate and, in fact, affects our ability to collect our average daily membership. And particularly at this time of the year whenever schools are counting those ABMs, suspending students for reasons associated with tardiness and absenteeism only perpetuates and can, in fact, have a negative impact on the dollars that we earn in our daily membership.

Disproportionate discipline for certain groups of students—students with disabilities, or students of color, and, in particular, males, do not serve us well in keeping students in school. The overuse of suspension and expulsion or the lack of alternative disciplinary practices do not serve the purpose of keeping students with disabilities in school, or students in general in school.

But there are also a number of positive aspects that schools felt that they were engaging in. There are a number of schools that were implementing school wide positive behavior support programs and, in fact, a number of states across the country have also incorporated positive behavior supports as a discipline intervention piece that's associated with their dropout prevention initiatives.

Ongoing professional development for principals, deans and teachers to make sure that everybody is aware of what the policies and procedures are so that they're implemented with fidelity. The review and the revision of policies and procedures to remove those kind of productive and conflicted procedures out of those policies, and also providing assistance and support for parents from school and community professionals.

Now, we're moving on to the academic related policies.

The goal of those academic related policies are developed to ensure equal access and participation of all students in substantive and rigorous curriculum experiences that are aligned with state and national standards for learning, and preparing youth for success after high school.

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They also describe how the school system determines the promotional students from kindergarten through Grade 12, and actions taken with the consequences for students who do not meet the promotion criteria are outlined for the specific grade level.

One of my selected examples for the academic policies and procedures is that of retention. And we know that grade retention has received more publicity in this area than any other single policy to retain or to social promote. The effect of that is a double-edged sword. Retention without remediation can doom a child to fail again where, on the other hand, social promotion can advance a child who lacks the record for academic skills.

There again, we have some—the link to dropout with retention, is a student retained in Grades K to 4 is five times more likely to drop out than students who are not retained. And there's a 90 percent likelihood that students who are retained twice will become dropouts. And retention in the ninth grade is a strong predictor of student dropout.

We look at the research on retention. The research findings in this area confirm that students who are retained do no better academically as measured by standardized tests compared to similar at-risk students who were promoted, and that students who are retained experience increased likelihood of dropping out, and that students who are overage for their grade, or who have been retained in grade at least once or more, are more likely to drop out than those who are not overage, or who have not been retained.

We began to look at the implications for retention. And one of the key essentials if the decision is to retain, is to make sure that the appropriate supports and interventions are in place to support the child if retention does, in fact, occur. As we began to gather information from our constituent partners about the positive and negative aspects of grade retention, some of the positives were that they were using diagnostics and other assessment data to identify areas of academic weaknesses, and then providing support for those students in that area.

Response to intervention and using RTI as part of this process is a promise in evidence-based practice and looking at assisting students who are at risk of retention, or who have, in fact, been retained to get them the supports that they need. Ensuring needed supports for a retained child. Don't retain a child without providing instructional support so that the child will learn and succeed. And if you don't provide them with supports, the only thing that we're often providing the child with is another unsuccessful attempt at doing over.

Some of the negatives of retention is that retaining a child without proper provided appropriate academic remediation and support only results in the child failing again or being socially promoted the second go around, and that social promotion to keep children with their peers is not always a positive aspect of things.

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We also began to look at some other negative and positive implications related to academic policies. One of the big ones is the insufficient credit for promotion and graduation. We decided to avoid the whole notion of high stakes testing because the jury is still out on high stakes testing as to whether or not high stakes testing has indeed influenced the graduation and dropout rates in a negative fashion. On the one hand, you have students who are experiencing success in the general education curriculum with their non-disabled peers, and the increase in the number of diplomas that are being—regular diplomas that are being awarded for students with disabilities.

But on the down side of it, you also have the students that are required to pass graduation tests as a condition for exiting school.

So, the jury is still out as to the effect of high stakes testing. But we know that some of the negative academics is the course failure. What do we begin to do early on to begin to remediate some of the course failure? We often know through tracking and monitoring the academic progress, we know a tenth grader who has only five core credits for graduation, that we really don't need to wait until the second semester of his junior year to innovate in that aspect. We know that school transitions play a major role. And, particularly, as we look at the benefits from freshmen academies, and orientations of ninth graders as they move into school, in changing expectations and course requirements, and what they will need to have in place in order to graduate four years later.

We know that passing the proficiency or the exit graduation examination to earn a regular diploma poses issues for students even those students who are passing. There are a number of districts that have put into place tutorials that assist students in learning the necessary skills and in practicing the necessary tests and formats that will facilitate them passing these graduation tests. And also the limited diploma options for students with disabilities, are a major issue for some states and for some school districts.

You have some states that there is only one diploma as opposed to states that they may have five or six different diplomas. And all of that comes into play in your dropout and in your graduation rates as to who is graduating and who is not and what your rates are, and how those rates compare nationally.

Some of the positive aspects of some things that were going on—many districts have put into place freshmen academies and small learning communities, credit recovery and protection programs to assist those students who were behind in credits, and running out of time, and using after school or web-based programs for credit recovery.

Looking at after-school and tutoring and mentoring programs, and those tutoring and mentoring programs that did not just provide an additional opportunity for practice on a skill, but actually engaged in using a differential and—differentiating

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instruction, and directing explicit instructional methods to engage the student in the learning process so that learning was more apt to occur, and so that there was a mechanism for the student to learn the skills and to catch up in the class work.

Looking at twilight programs, and alternative schools. Many districts that have implemented the twilight programs, which essentially is starting school at a later time of day, we found out from research on high school students some years ago that high school students learn best between the hours of 11:00 and 5:00 or later, but we start high school programs at 7:30 in the morning. So, a number of districts have instituted twilight programs, and alternative schools for those students that because of discipline or for academic deficiencies, require a different location, a different scenario and a different setting in which to become successful.

And then there're the ongoing prep courses for the exit exams that also play an important role.

We've also seen the use of block scheduling for reading in early grades, and offering reading instructions in Grades 3 through 12, to look at combating the deficiencies of struggling adolescent readers, that will go into the core content area courses within the high school without the necessary reading skills to comprehend the content.

Looking at reviewing curriculum to ensure alignment with the state academic standards, all too often, we find standards that are dis-aligned so that the students are actually learning things that they are not necessarily being tested upon. And so while they're progressing their course to course, they're having difficulties passing the state standards and the—state assessments that are built on those academic standards.

Looking at offering night programs for credit recovery, and also looking at requiring students to stay in high school and perform well, to attend career tech programs. Some of the negative practices that they identified that they had in place was that credit accrual that was tied to attendance instead of content mastering. And that really poses a double-edge sword because there is that notion in those policies that seek to foster those independent skills and those responsible skills of getting up, and getting to school, and being in class on time. But the need to look at balance, there's a number of schools that have combated that by having exceptions and waivers that can be put into place based upon a case-by-case review of the student's circumstances.

We were apprised of a condition of that nature with a young woman who was a woman—a student with a disability in high school that had missed about nine consecutive days out of school, and was about ready to be dropped from the roll, as well as dropped from the course, even though they were making a C in the class. And as you look further into the situation, the young woman's mother was

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in the hospital. She had been in a coma during that period of time. The school does not accept notices from the student themselves nor phone calls from people other than parents with unexcused absences. And until the social worker decided one day just to go and knock on the door, they had no way of really finding out what was really going on with the young woman except she was about to get dropped from her classes, considered a drop out, and not receive course credit for the courses that she was passing, all because her mom was in the hospital, unconscious, and there was no telephone access that she had. And even if there had been a telephone, the school did not accept calls from students.

Another issue looking at curriculum not aligned to the content standards, and it's got summer school programs that lack rigor and that don't concentrate on the skills in which the students need to have in order to pass the course and get credits.

At this point in time, I'm going to pause, and turn the program over to Dr. Klare, and he's going to talk to us about school exiting policies, and some strategies and recommendations from the field and from research.