


***The Impact of Policies and Procedures on Dropout and School Completion***

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National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities  
NDPC-SD

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***Today's Teleseminar***

- ◆ The Context of School Policies and School Completion
- ◆ Types of Policies that Influence School Completion and Examples from the Field
- ◆ Proposed Strategies and Recommendations from Research and Practice

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***What is Needed to Support School Completion Initiatives?***

- ◆ Strategic planning
- ◆ Clear definitions and requirements
- ◆ Adequate resources
- ◆ Professional development/training
- ◆ Accountability – concrete and reasonable goals and measures
- ◆ Clear and sensible policies/procedures

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## *The Context*



The Role of Policies:  
Why Policies Matter




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### *Role of Policies and Procedures*

- ◆ Provide a structure for governance of school processes
  - ◆ Guide program development
  - ◆ At a state level, they ensure consistency across districts
  - ◆ At state and local levels, they ensure consistency of implementation over time
  - ◆ At a local level, they ensure consistency of implementation across individuals

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### *Levels of Policy & Procedures*

- ◆ Governmental Level (Federal and State)
  - ◆ Laws and regulations (NCLB, IDEA, state statues)
  - ◆ Definitions and procedures
  - ◆ Accountability (monitoring, school improvement, rewards, sanctions)
- ◆ Local Level (District/School)
  - ◆ District and Board policies
  - ◆ School-wide initiatives
  - ◆ District and school procedures

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***Issues at the Federal/State Level***

- ◆ Alignment of definitions and measurement
  - ◆ Definition of a graduate
  - ◆ Definition of a dropout
  - ◆ Calculation of graduation rate
  - ◆ Calculation of dropout rate
- ◆ Accountability for progress toward targets
- ◆ Program support (allocation of funds, TA)
- ◆ Availability of highly qualified personnel

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***Issues at the Local Level***

- ◆ Establishing and disseminating clear policies and procedures
- ◆ Securing stakeholder buy-in for new ideas and initiatives
- ◆ Availability of resources to support new programs and initiatives

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***Why Policies Matter Regarding School Completion***

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## Pathway to School Dropout

- Not an isolated event
  - Elementary years, process begins
    - Elevated dropout rates reported among children who were rated as **highly aggressive** by their 1<sup>st</sup> grade teachers (Enninger & Skarlicki, 1992)
    - Dropouts could be distinguished from graduates with 66% accuracy by the third grade using **attendance** data; and
    - Identification of dropouts can be accomplished with reasonable accuracy based on review of school performance (**behavior, attendance, academics**) during the elementary years (Barrington & Hendricks, 1995)
- Students who had repeated a grade as early as K – 4<sup>th</sup> grade were **5x more likely to drop out of school** (Kaufman & Bradby, 1992).



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## Middle School Predictors of Dropout

(Balfanz & Herzog, 2005; 2006)

1. The four strongest predictors – determined by the end of sixth grade
  1. **Poor attendance**
  2. **Poor behavior**
  3. **Failing math**
  4. **Failing English**
2. Sixth graders who do not attend school regularly, receive poor behavior marks, or fail math or English
  - 10% chance of graduating on time
  - 20% chance of graduating a year late



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## Middle School Predictors of Dropout

(Balfanz, 2006)

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| ▪ Poor attendance      | ▪ 14% graduated on-time or with one extra year |
| ▪ Bad behavior records | ▪ 17% on-time graduation rate                  |
| ▪ Failed math          | ▪ 21% on-time graduation rate                  |
| ▪ Failed English       | ▪ 16% on-time graduation rate                  |

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### ***Middle School Predictors of Dropout***

3. Students who **repeated middle school grades** are 11 times more likely to drop out than students who had not repeated
4. A student who is **retained two grades** increases their risk of dropping out of high school by 90% (Roderick, 1995).
5. Transition between schools are critical times for at risk students
  - Middle school/junior high school to high school

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### ***High School Predictors of Dropout***

(Balfanz & Herzog, 2006)

1. 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
2. **Ninth grade retention** is the biggest predictor of dropouts
3. The biggest fall off for students is **between ninth and tenth grade**
4. Emerging trend of increased dropout at grades 11 & 12

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### ***How Do We Influence Dropout?***

Why are we responsible?

- School policies & procedures
  - Discipline, grading, standards, retention
- Structure & class assignment
  - School size, transitions, tracking
- Course content & instruction
  - Boredom, curriculum quality
- Climate & relationships
  - Alienation, negative interactions



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### *Types of Policies that Influence School Completion -*



Selected examples from the field


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### *Types of Policies and Procedures that Affect School Completion*

- ◆ Attendance related policies
- ◆ Discipline related policies
- ◆ Academic related policies
  - ◆ Credit accrual
  - ◆ Use of evidence-based practices
  - ◆ Grade retention
- ◆ School exiting related policies
  - ◆ Dropout and Graduation
  - ◆ Transference of student records

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### *School Policy: Attendance*

- ◆ The goal: To promote consistent school attendance. School attendance serves as a key indicator of "adequate yearly progress" at the middle school level" under NCLB.
- ◆ Link to Dropout:
  - ◆ Approximately 30% of high schoolers, 20% of middle schoolers and 14% of elementary students are chronically truant.
  - ◆ High absenteeism and retention are serious risk factors for dropping out that can be monitored by schools. 80% of dropouts were chronically truant during the year in which they dropped out.

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***School Policy: Regular School Attendance***

**◆ Research findings in this area have concluded that:**

- ◆ Consistent school attendance has a high positive correlation to academic success and school completion.
- ◆ 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 lives—including college and the workplace.

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***Effective Attendance Policies***

(Skiba & Kresting, 2001)

- ◆ Are clearly written, publicized and communicated to all staff, students and parents
- ◆ Clearly distinguish between the difference between excused and unexcused absences
- ◆ Are aligned with the district's policies and goals

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***Effective Attendance Policies***

(Skiba & Kresting, 2001)

- ◆ Avoid the use of suspensions and expulsions for truancy and instead, consider less severe consequences, such as community service or in-school detentions
- ◆ Contain effective reporting, recording and monitoring processes. Investigate the various computerized attendance tracking systems currently available
- ◆ Include full family involvement, with parent notification and frequent home-school contact

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### ***Effective Attendance Policies***

(Skiba & Kresting, 2001)

- ◆ Clearly specify how reward or incentive program will be used
- ◆ Develop two-way contracts among students, administrators, teachers, and families that delineate standards of performance for the student, services the school will provide, or changes the school will make

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### ***Components of Successful Programs***

- ◆ Include special attention to health and special education needs
- ◆ Use data to drive decision-making
- ◆ Involve community and business
- ◆ Focus on school transition years
- ◆ Include public awareness activities
- ◆ Include meaningful parent involvement

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### ***Components of Successful Programs***

- ◆ Provide a balanced continuum of Incentives and sanctions
- ◆ Focus is on prevention
- ◆ Emphasize early warning and intensive intervention
- ◆ Provide a continuum of strategies
- ◆ Provide alternative options to court

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## ***Attendance Related Practices***

(Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative, 2007)

### **POSITIVES**

- ◆ Incentive programs for good or improved attendance
- ◆ Early warning system in place for monitoring attendance after second occurrence
- ◆ Extended day programs for students with excessive absenteeism and tardiness
- ◆ Family Resource Centers

### **NEGATIVES**

- ◆ Suspending youth for being tardy or absent
- ◆ Absenteeism linked to credit accrual
- ◆ Punitive, non-proactive actions for parents due to truancy (lack of early warning systems for monitoring attendance)

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## ***Attendance Related Practices***

(Intensive TA Schools, 2006-2007)

### **◆ Positive**

- ◆ Rewarding good/perfect attendance
- ◆ Having senior mentors for truant freshmen
- ◆ Parent must telephone if a student will be out
- ◆ Random calls to parents of absent students

### **◆ Negative**

- ◆ Locking school doors to keep out latecomers
- ◆ Suspending students who are often truant

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## ***School policy: Student Discipline***

- ◆ The overall goal 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.

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***School policy: Student Discipline***

◆ Link to Dropout:

- ◆ Repeated use of exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspension, has been identified as one of the major factors contributing to dropout.
- ◆ Elevated dropout rates reported among children who were rated as highly aggressive by their 1<sup>st</sup> grade teachers (Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992).
- ◆ Sixth graders who do not attend school regularly, receive **poor behavior marks**, or fail math or English have only 10% chance of graduating on time and 20% chance of graduating a year later (Balfanz & Herzog, 2005; 2006)

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***School policy: Student Discipline***

◆ Research findings in this area have concluded that:

- ◆ student disorder interrupts not only school safety, but decreases student achievement as well.
- ◆ when misconduct is not confronted, misbehaving students are likely to infer that such behavior will be tolerated.

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***School policy: Student Discipline***

◆ Research findings in this area have concluded that:

- ◆ Some school discipline practices promote antisocial behavior.
- ◆ Many school practices contribute to the development of antisocial behavior and the potential for violence. These factors are all amenable to change in a positive, proactive manner (Mayer, 1995; Sugai & Horner, 1994; Walker et al., 1996).

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### ***School policy: Student Discipline***

◆ **Research findings in this area have concluded that:**

- ◆ School personnel have a long history of applying simple and unproven solutions to complex behavior problems (e.g., office discipline referrals, suspensions), rather than focusing on the administrative, teaching and management practices that either contribute to, or reduce them (Tobin, Sugai, & Martin, 2000).

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### ***Example***

◆ **Policy or Practice:** *“zero tolerance” policies*

◆ **The Effect:**

- + Sends clear message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated in the school
- Often used in excess resulting in “push out effects”

◆ **Alternative Solutions:**

- ◆ Shift discipline from reducing negative incidents to promoting positive functioning
- ◆ Provide guidance for desired behaviors as opposed to merely enforcing punitive consequences

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### ***Discipline Related Policies***

**NEGATIVES**

- ◆ Disparate implementation of zero tolerance policies
- ◆ Punishment (suspension) for absenteeism and tardiness
- ◆ Disproportionate discipline for certain groups of students (students with disabilities, students of color, and males)
- ◆ Overuse of suspension and expulsion (lack of alternative disciplinary practices)

**POSITIVES**

- ◆ Positive behavior supports
- ◆ On-going professional development for principals, deans, and teachers
- ◆ Review and revision to remove counterproductive and conflicting procedures
- ◆ Assistance and support for parents from school and community professionals

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***Academic Related Policies***

- ◆ 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 prepare youth for success after high school
- ◆ Describes how the school system determines the promotion of students from Kindergarten through grade twelve and actions taken with the consequences for students who do not meet the promotion criteria outlined for the specific grade level

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***Selected Example #1***

- ◆ **Policy/Practice:** Grade Retention
- ◆ **The effect:** Double-edged — Retention without remediation can doom a child to fail again. Social promotion can advance a child who lacks the requisite academic skills.

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***Promotion and Retention***

- ◆ **Link to Dropout:** A student retained in grades K – 4 is 5 times more likely to drop out than students who were not retained
  - ◆ There is 90% likelihood that students who are retained twice will drop out
  - ◆ Retention in the 9th grade is a very strong predictor of dropout

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***Promotion and Retention***

◆ **Research findings in this area confirm that:**

- ◆ students who are retained do not do better academically as measured by standardized test compared to similar at risk students who were promoted.
- ◆ students who are retained experience increased likelihood of dropping out.
- ◆ students who are over age for their grade or who have been retained in grade at least once are more likely to drop out than those who are not over age or who have not been retained.

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***Grade Retention***

◆ **Positive**

- ◆ Using diagnostic and other assessment data to identify areas of academic weakness
- ◆ Ensuring needed support for retained child (i.e., don't retain a child without providing instruction/support so the child will learn and succeed)

◆ **Negative**

- ◆ Retaining a student without providing academic remediation and support
- ◆ Social promotion to keep children with their peers

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***Academic Related Policies***

<p><b>NEGATIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Insufficient credit for promotion or graduation</li> <li>◆ Course failure</li> <li>◆ School transitions</li> <li>◆ Passing the proficiency or exit/graduation examination to earn a regular diploma (even though student passes courses)</li> <li>◆ Limited diploma options for students with disabilities</li> </ul>	<p><b>POSITIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Freshmen Academies</li> <li>◆ Small Learning Communities</li> <li>◆ Credit recovery and protection programs</li> <li>◆ After school tutoring and mentoring programs</li> <li>◆ Twilight programs and alternative schools</li> <li>◆ On-going prep courses for exit exams</li> </ul>
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### ***Academic Related Policies***

#### **◆ Positive**

- ◆ Using block scheduling for reading in early grades
- ◆ Offering reading instruction in Grades 3 - 12
- ◆ Reviewing curriculum to ensure alignment with state academic standards
- ◆ Offering night programs for credit recovery
- ◆ Requiring students to stay in HS and perform well to attend career-tech program

#### **◆ Negative**

- ◆ Credit accrual tied to attendance (instead of content mastery)
- ◆ Curriculum not aligned to content standards
- ◆ Summer-school programs that lack rigor

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### ***School Exiting Policies***

- ◆ **The Goal:** To set forth conditions and requirements by which students exit school. Exiting categories include graduation, dropout, death, moved or transferred.

#### **◆ Link to Dropout:**

- ◆ One in three students with disabilities do not graduate on time with a regular diploma ([www.ideadata.org](http://www.ideadata.org))
- ◆ NLTS-2 data suggest that 28% of students with disabilities who left school did so by dropping out

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### ***Graduation Requirements***

- ◆ States, on average, require 20 course credits for students to earn a high school diploma, with 24 states offering advanced recognition to students who exceed standard graduation requirements. But only eight of those states provide advanced recognition for students in a career and technical field.
- ◆ Twenty-two states now require students to pass an exit exam to earn a diploma. In 18 of those states, the exams are based on standards at the 10th grade level or higher. Sixteen of the exit-exam states also offer an appeals process or an alternative route to a diploma for students who fail the tests.

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### ***Diploma Options***

- ◆ The overall goal of offering multiple diplomas is to offer programs of study tailored to the goals, needs and capabilities of students.
- ◆ The issue: in many states, recipients of an alternative diploma are not considered graduates.

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### ***Diploma Options***

- ◆ **Positive**
  - ◆ If multiple diplomas are offered, all are considered "graduating"
  - ◆ The diplomas offered support students' needs, interests, and post-secondary goals
    - ◆ E.g., IEP students can earn a regular diploma
- ◆ **Negative**
  - ◆ IEP students can receive only a certificate, which does not count as regular graduation
  - ◆ Students enrolled in GED programs are always considered dropouts

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### ***School Exiting Related Policies***

#### **NEGATIVES**

- ◆ Compulsory attendance (too early)
- ◆ Four year limitation to graduate with a standard diploma
- ◆ Lack of policies that document, track, and address school withdrawal (e.g., moved not known to be continued)
- ◆ Lack of youth and family counseling before withdrawal

#### **POSITIVES**

- ◆ Change compulsory age from 16 to 18
- ◆ Extending time to complete coursework for a standard diploma
- ◆ Increase districts accountability for tracking students within and across districts
- ◆ Data-based decision making systems

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## ***School Completion (Dropout and Graduation)***

### **◆ Positive**

- ◆ School has a school-completion initiative that includes students with disabilities
- ◆ Developing clear definitions of dropout and graduation
- ◆ Requiring parent/guardian and judge to withdraw if <17 years old. Else, child loses driver's license & work permit

### **◆ Negative**

- ◆ IEP students don't get a standard diploma when they graduate
- ◆ Students who take >4 years are not "regular" graduates

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## ***Transference of Records***

### **◆ Need for clear procedures**

- ◆ To ensure consistent procedure is used
- ◆ So kids don't "fall through the cracks" in the system. These kids **are** counted as dropouts!

*(This slide and the transition slide that follows are new – the audience doesn't have them)*

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***Some Proposed Strategies from  
Research and Practice***



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### ***Governmental Level***

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### ***Proposed Strategies at the State Level***

- ◆ Allow students a longer time in which to earn a "regular" diploma (move from four years to five or six) especially for students with disabilities and ELL students.
- ◆ Revise graduation policies so youth with IEPs earning a certificate ARE counted as graduates.

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### ***Proposed Strategies at the State Level***

- ◆ Increase age of compulsory school attendance to 18.
- ◆ Change the withdrawal process: conduct an 'exit interview' before allowing a student to dropout. This process should include family counseling, academic counseling, as well as vocational counseling and referral.

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***Proposed Strategies at the State Level***

- ◆ Driver's License / Work Permit
  - ◆ Students who drop out without parental permission **and** that of their principal could lose their driver's licenses and work permits if unable to demonstrate financial hardship as the reason for withdrawing.
  - ◆ Chronic absenteeism: missing more than **n** days of school would trigger loss of drivers' license / work permit.

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***Proposed Strategies at the State Level***

- ◆ Wisconsin's Learnfare program, which makes welfare support contingent on school attendance

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***Effecting Change at the Federal/State Level***

- ◆ Meet with stakeholders to achieve consensus on what is needed and how to get there.
- ◆ Include students, teachers, teachers' union reps, superintendents, principals, business & industry, community groups, legislators, other relevant stakeholders.
- ◆ Propose legislation to support dropout prevention and school completion.
- ◆ Gain buy-in from the general public.

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### ***Local Level***

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### ***Proposed Strategies at the Local Level***

- ◆ Provide ***flexibility in school programs***
  - ◆ Allow high-school students to engage in relevant learning by ***enrolling in a 4-year*** or community college, a technical career center, or to ***be meaningfully employed***, while the high school continues to count (and pay for) the student as a full-day student.
  - ◆ Allow students in such academic programs to ***earn high-school AND college credit concurrently***.

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### ***Proposed Strategies at the Local Level***

- ◆ Start a ***credit recovery program*** for students to make up credits that they are missing or failed to receive in a timely manner.
- ◆ Instead of retaining a child in elementary school, provide ***early intervention and intense remediation***. Retention often begins the path to dropout.
- ◆ Change the starting hour for high schools by opening later in the morning. High-school age kids need the rest.

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***Proposed Strategies at the Local Level***

- ◆ Develop **reading and math labs** where struggling students can keep from falling behind in their courses.
- ◆ **Review discipline policies** addressing expulsion and suspension. Make expulsion a rare event and offer in-school alternatives to suspension.
- ◆ Start school-wide **behavior programs** in middle- and high schools.
- ◆ Examine **feeder-school patterns** in areas of high dropout and intervene early.

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***Proposed Strategies at the Local Level***

- ◆ Standardize grading systems so they match among neighboring schools (e.g., what grade constitutes passing/failing).
- ◆ Improve curriculum and instruction so all students receive the same high-quality learning opportunities.
- ◆ Provide wrap-around services. Academic difficulties aren't the only reasons that youth drop out.

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***Proposed Strategies at the Local Level***

- ◆ Develop attendance policies with the **intent to change behavior, not to punish**. Reconsider the use of zero-tolerance policies such as suspensions for truancy and instead consider less severe consequences such as community service or in-school detentions (Skiba & Kresting, 2001).
- ◆ Listen to what the students say. They know what they want out of school!

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### ***Effecting Change at the Local Level***

- ◆ Talk about the problem and invite everyone to the table.
- ◆ Examine the data related to school completion.
- ◆ Think outside the box.
- ◆ Ask questions and seek promising practices.
- ◆ Connect to the full spectrum of the K-16 education system.

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### ***After this Teleseminar...***

- ◆ Review and, as needed, revise your district's dropout-related policies and procedures on:
  - ◆ Attendance
  - ◆ Discipline: suspension/expulsion/office referrals
  - ◆ Curriculum/academic issues
  - ◆ Grade retention
  - ◆ School completion (dropout and graduation)
  - ◆ Diploma options
  - ◆ Maintaining/transferring student records
  - ◆ Exit codes (E.g., moved, not known to be continuing)

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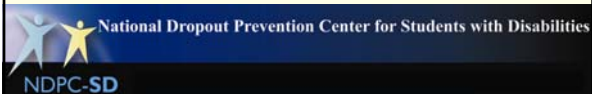
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