



Keeping Teens in High School

By Sunny Deyé

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The social and economic costs of high school dropouts are staggering. Dropouts not only earn significantly less (a lifetime average of \$260,000 less than high school graduates), but they also contribute to billions of dollars in uninsured health care and crime-related costs. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, dropouts from the Class of 2007 alone will cost the nation nearly \$329 billion in lost wages, taxes and productivity over their lifetimes.

Recent reports indicate that more than 1 million students who enter ninth grade each year fail to graduate with their peers four years later, and that approximately 7,000 students drop out every school day. According to the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, some 70 percent of students nationally graduate from high school on time, but little more than half of African-American and Hispanic students earn diplomas with their peers.

Successful school policies include "rigor, relevance and relationships."

State Action Research shows that successful schools embed "rigor, relevance and relationships" in their framework. Coined by the Gates Foundation, this phrase refers to "... rigorous academic coursework, meaningful relationships with instructors who can help students meet high standards, and relevant learning opportunities through internships and community partnerships." Recent state legislative attempts to improve dropout rates have included policies to increase the rigor and relevance of curricula and improve in-school relationships so that students find high school more challenging and meaningful.

Rigor. Oklahoma, South Dakota and Texas have increased math and science course requirements for high school graduation, phasing in a requirement that all students complete the biology, chemistry and physics sequence. Arkansas, Delaware, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Texas are phasing in a requirement that all students complete the Algebra I, II, geometry sequence.

Some states have expanded their advanced placement programs.

Relevance. Arkansas expanded advanced placement programs, requiring each Arkansas school district to provide at least one such course in each of four course areas. Florida requires ninth grade students to choose from one of 400 majors and take four of their eight elective classes in this college-style major.

Relationships. North Carolina requires the state Board of Education to report on counselors and high school retention and to include dropout prevention in counselors' duties. Georgia appropriates funds for a graduation coach in each of the state's 385 public high schools. The coach's primary responsibility is to identify at-risk students and help keep them on track academically.

Indiana legislation resulted from statewide town meetings with businesses, educators, parents and higher education leaders.

- *Consequences for Dropouts.* Students younger than age 18 can drop out of high school only for financial or health reasons or with permission of a judge.
- *School Flex Program.* Students in grades 11 and 12 can enroll in a college or technical career education program or be employed. The student—who must attend school for at least three hours daily, pursue timely graduation, not be suspended or expelled, and maintain a 95 percent attendance rate—is counted as a full-day student.
- *Annual Reporting of School Progress.* On the annual school report card, high schools must report total suspensions, students who are permitted to drop out, work permits revoked, driver's permits revoked, students in the school flex program, and freshmen who do not earn enough credits to become sophomores.
- *Annual Review of Student Career Plans.* Students who are at risk of dropping out must complete student career plans, and schools must counsel them about credit recovery options and services available so the student can graduate on time.
- *Fast Track Program.* Community colleges, public colleges and universities can offer a high school completion program to students age 19 or older or to students who have the high school's permission.
- *Double Up Program.* In this dual credit program offered by community colleges, public colleges and universities, students can earn an associate's degree. Free and reduced lunch students receive tuition waivers.

Texas legislation dedicates \$120 million to dropout prevention.

- *Best Practice Studies and Strategic Planning.* A state allocation of \$1.5 million supports research on best practices for dropout prevention, and the commissioners of education are to recommend legislation to implement them.
- *Graduation Requirements.* Each student must have a personal graduation plan, and state standards are to be aligned with higher education admissions requirements.
- *Grants for Schools and Districts.* Because extracurricular programs often correlate with lower dropout rates, \$5 million goes to support student clubs. No more than \$5,000 per year can go to an individual club, and 60 percent of students in the club must qualify as "at-risk" for dropping out.
- *Funding for Innovative Programs.* These funds support intensive, technology-based supplementary instruction in English, math, science or social studies for students in ninth through 12th grades who are at risk of dropping out of school. Funds also are available to create intensive summer programs that provide rigorous academic instruction for at least four weeks.

Resources

Alliance for Excellent Education. *Fact Sheet: High School Dropouts in America.* Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007; http://www.all4ed.org/publications/GraduationRates_FactSheet.pdf.

Editorial Projects in Education Research Center. *Ready for What? Preparing Students for College, Careers, and Life After High School.* Bethesda, Md.: Education Week, 2007; <http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2007/06/12/index.html>.

Indiana HB 1794 (2005) and HB 1347 (2006) provide comprehensive ways to reduce dropouts and improve graduation rates; see <http://www.in.gov/legislative/bills/2005/HE/HE1794.1.html>; and <http://www.in.gov/legislative/bills/2006/HE/HE1347.1.html>.

Texas HB 2237 (2007) provides strategies to reduce dropouts and improve graduation rates; see <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlodocs/80R/billtext/html/HB02237F.htm>.

Contacts for More Information

Sunny Deyé
NCSL—Denver
(303) 364-7700, ext. 1469
sunny.deye@ncsl.org

NCSL Education Bill Tracking Database
www.ncsl.org/programs/educ/educ_leg.cfm

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