Rapid Response—Educating Overage Students

Date	August 28, 2008
Number	00078
Request	A state department of education (SDE) served by the Southeast Comprehensive Center has requested information on educating overage students, those who may be at least two grades behind and are at risk of dropping out of high school. In particular, some districts want to enroll students with their age group, enroll them in an alternative setting, or enroll them in a vocational program. The client would like to know if other states have any special programs, strategies, or initiatives for meeting the needs of these students.
Summary	To obtain information for this request, the Southeast Comprehensive Center (SECC) contacted the National High School Center (NHSC), SERVE, and SDEs for states throughout the United States. SECC reviewed information provided by the respondents and used various Web search engines to locate additional information on the topic. The results are provided below.

SUMMARIES OF RELEVANT LITERATURE ON IDENTIFYING AND TARGETING STUDENTS AT RISK FOR DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL

SECC received information on the topic from the NHSC, SERVE, and several SDEs, which was used to prepare the summaries and the table below. SECC conducted a review of relevant literature on identifying students who are at risk of dropping out of school and models and programs that may be effective in helping these students to complete school. Summaries of the key findings of this review are provided below.

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Summary 1

Blue, D., & Cook, E. (2004). *Issue brief—High school dropouts: Can we reverse the stagnation in school graduation?* (Volume 1, Issue 1). Austin, TX: The University of Texas Department of Educational Administration. Retrieved on August 12, 2008, from http://www.edb.utexas.edu/hsns/HSNSbrief2.pdf

The authors discussed dropout statistics and factors that affect dropping out, such as schooling conditions, individual personality traits, home environment, and the economic context in which individuals live. The authors said that early interventions—before middle and high school-are generally recommended strategies for dropout prevention. They also identified grade retention as a key factor in identifying students who may be at-risk for dropping out of school, indicating that students who have been retained have a much higher probability of dropping out of high school than nonretained students. Another key finding of the authors is that successful transition to 9th grade is critical in ensuring academic success for students, since there is a high incidence of dropping out in 9th grade. In addition, the authors found that schools that were able to keep students engaged and enrolled in school had the following characteristics challenging curricula and fewer remedial courses, smaller learning environments, teaching practices that were culturally relevant to students, a caring and supportive school climate and staff, varied opportunities for participation in school activities, and individualized learning plans and interventions.

Summary 2

Kennelly, L., & Monrad, M. (2007). *Approaches to dropout prevention: Heeding early warning signs with appropriate interventions.* Washington, DC: National High School Center. Retrieved on August 12, 2008, from http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_ApproachestoDropoutPrevention.pdf

The authors of this report discussed several important issues, such as who drops out and when, ways to predict dropout, factors related to dropping out, social indicators, dropout data, early warning data systems, and best practices for reducing dropout rates. The authors also highlighted key features of research-based dropout prevention programs, wrap-around services, and characteristics of research-based high school improvement programs. The authors indicated that best practices for reducing dropout rates include improving school climate, providing curricula and courses that have rigor and relevance, providing high-quality, effective teachers for at-risk students, and extending learning time to provide intensive, individualized interventions to meet students' academic needs. The authors also discussed eight research-based dropout prevention programs that are included in the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) but indicated that only a few—*Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success, Check & Connect,* and *Career Academies*—have shown positive results.

In addition, the authors identified the following characteristics of research-based high school improvement programs:
- Attendance and behavior monitors
- Focus on achievement in core courses
- Tutoring as an academic support
- Counseling and mentoring
- Small learning communities
- Catch-up courses
- Homeroom, teams, or looping
- Ninth Grade Academies or transition programs
- Tiered approach to behavioral and/or academic support
- Focus on positive results for students with disabilities
- Career and college awareness
- Family and community engagement
- Partnerships between high schools and feeder middle schools

Summary 3

Lehr, C., Johnson, D., Bremer, C., Cosio, A., & Thompson, M. (2004). *Essential tools—Increasing rates of school completion: Moving from policy and research to practice (a manual for policymakers, administrators, and educators)*. Minneapolis, MN: National Center on Secondary Education and Transition. Retrieved on August 22, 2008, from http://www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/dropout/

The authors of this report provided a summary of research-based dropout prevention programs and interventions as well as examples of interventions that have shown evidence of effectiveness. The authors discussed what is known about dropout prevention, explained their decision making process for selecting intervention programs for review, and provided abstracts of the 11 dropout intervention programs that they reviewed (see below).

- Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (ALAS)
- Career Academies
- Check & Connect
- Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program
- Interpersonal Relations/Personal Growth Class
- Ninth Grade Dropout Prevention Program (NGP)
- Preventing School Dropout Beginning in Elementary Grades
- Project COFFEE
- School Transitional Environment Project (STEP)
- Support Center for Adolescent Mothers (Family Growth Center)
- Teen Outreach Program (TOP)

The authors acknowledged that although there is not yet a solid foundation of research on dropout intervention and prevention on which to base strong conclusions, enough information is available to help educators, administrators, and policymakers make informed decisions.

Summary 4

Martin, N., & Halperin, S. (2006). *Whatever it takes: How twelve communities are reconnecting out-of-school youth*. Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum. Retrieved on August 22, 2008, from http://www.aypf.org/publications/WhateverItTakes.htm

The authors documented a number of approaches used by educators, policymakers, and community leaders throughout the United States to help reconnect out-of-school youth to services and educational opportunities. They describe what 12 communities are doing to help reconnect these students to education and employment training as well as major national program models for serving youth that are not enrolled in school. Case studies are provided for programs and services in communities located in Ohio, Kentucky, Utah, Texas, Oregon, California, Maryland, Arizona, New Jersey, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania. Programs and services detailed include charter schools; specialized public high schools; collaborative efforts between school districts, community-based organizations, and community colleges; partnerships with private sector and community-based groups; employment training programs; as well as education and job-readiness youth service and conservation corps.

Summary 5

Shannon, G., & Bylsma, P. (2003, updated 2006). *Helping students finish school: Why students drop out and how to help them graduate*. Olympia, WA: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Retrieved on August 22, 2008, from http://www.k12.wa.us/research/pubdocs/pdf/dropoutreport2003.pdf

In this publication, the authors discussed who drops out of school, why they drop out, and what can be done to reduce the number of dropouts. The authors detailed a number of reasons why students drop out of school, including

- Lack of adequate counseling
- Negative school climate
- Lack of relevant curriculum

- Passive teaching strategies
- Inappropriate use of technology
- Disregard for students' learning styles
- Retentions/suspensions
- Low expectations
- Lack of language instruction

The authors also stated that schools need to make systematic changes to reduce the dropout rate, such as making schools more personal by implementing smaller, supportive learning environments and using meaningful curricula and effective instruction to engage students in the learning process. The authors recommended that schools review and modify, if necessary, policies and practices related to discipline and attendance, standards and expectations, grading procedures, and grade retention. In addition to factors related to dropping out and recommendations for schools and districts, the authors discussed promising strategies for reducing the number of dropouts. These strategies included early intervention, supplemental programs, out-of-school enhancement programs, alternative programs, alternative schools, targeted programs, and other recovery programs.

Refer to Table 1 for a summary of information on models and programs for educating overage students and dropout prevention.

Note: The information provided in this document is for a small number of models and programs for which information was available. SECC does not endorse or recommend any of the models or programs discussed in this document.

Table 1. Models and Programs for Educating Overage Students and Dropout Prevention	
Title	**Description**
Boston Public Schools (Massachusetts)	The Boston Public Schools (BPS) Office of High School Renewal and Alternative Education offers a portfolio of schools and programs for students who have not been successful in completing their high school education through traditional settings and those who are at risk of dropping out of school. The BPS system includes six alternative schools that are run by the school system as well as a number of community-based organizations that provide other educational services. BPS also offers a set of community-based GED and career exploration programs for youth. Link to Web site: http://www.altedbps.org/about.htm
Buehrle Alternative School (Pennsylvania)	Buehrle Alternative School offers a number of alternative educational services and high school programs for students who have experienced discipline and truancy problems in their traditional school settings. Programs and services include community-based educational support; a residential shelter educational program; a computer-based academic program to help students meet the 21-credit graduation requirements; a Re-entry Program for students who have been out of school for longer than a semester; as well as a Twilight Program, which is held after regular school hours at Buehrle. Link to Web site: http://www.lancaster.k12.pa.us/alternative/buehrle/events.htm
Charleston County Public Schools (South Carolina)	Charleston Public Schools offers the Charleston County Middle Grades Acceleration Program (M-GAP) and the Elementary Grades Acceleration Project (E-GAP) to provide overage 4th and 7th grade students opportunities to reach their age appropriate grade levels, close achievement gaps, and further learning to catch up with their peers. The programs include additional instruction in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, small class settings, personalized attention for students, technology-based learning, behavioral health and related services, life skills programs, and crisis intervention services, as needed. The M-GAP and E-GAP programs were developed to address the growing problem of overage students in CPS, which had 663 9th grade students who were 2 or more years over age during the last school year. The M-GAP program has experienced success, with about 90% of the 7th grade students who completed the entire M-GAP year going on to the 9th grade. In addition, program benchmark tests have shown that over 55% of M-GAP students made significant gains in ELA and mathematics. Link to resource: http://www.cgcs.org/past/gap0747.pdf

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Title	Description
Daylight/Twilight High School (New Jersey)	The Daylight/Twilight Program serves overage students ages 16 and older who are under-credited and have academic, behavioral, social, or personal problems. The program offers a flexible schedule that allows students to attend school in 4-hour sessions from 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. The program focuses on individualized learning, allowing teachers flexibility in modifying their curricula to meet the needs of students. Course subjects include language arts, health, social studies, science, technology, mathematics, electives, and college preparatory. Advanced Academics Inc. recently funded a $40 million downtown campus for Daylight/Twilight High School, which has grown from about 300 students to serving over 2,200 students each year. Links to resources: http://www.princeton.edu/~cbli/profiles/daylight-twilight.html http://www.reuters.com/article/pressRelease/idUS170276+12-Jun-2008+BW20080612
Diploma Plus (Massachusetts)	Initiated in 1996 by two community-based groups in Boston, Diploma Plus (DP) is an alternative education model that provides education services for at-risk youth or those who are formerly not enrolled in school. In 2000, the program had grown to 10 sites that served 700 at-risk or formerly unenrolled students. Diploma Plus offers a range of educational options such as, community-based satellite programs that are run with local public schools, district-run alternative high schools, a charter school, GED programs, a community college that hosts the DP model in collaboration with local public school districts, and smaller learning communities within large urban high schools. Youth targeted by the program are those between the ages of 16 and 21, which includes those who have dropped out of school and those who are at least 1.5 years behind in classes. The DP model includes a performance-based method of obtaining a high school diploma that focuses on meeting academic and life skills. Students must demonstrate what they have learned by completing a portfolio of real-world projects and learning activities. In the final phase of the program—the Plus Phase—students must successfully complete several major projects, such as an internship and one or more college-level courses in order to obtain a high school diploma. DP reported that 70% of its students in the program went on to postsecondary education and careers. Link to resource: http://www.aypf.org/forumbriefs/2000/fb102000.htm
Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation (New York)	New York City's Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation (OMPG) was developed to address its school system's growing problem of overage students who are behind in classes or not enrolled in school. The city has nearly 138,000 young people between the ages of 16 and 21 who have dropped out of school or are seriously off-track for graduation. City officials determined that nearly 50% of all incoming freshmen become overage and under-credited in high school. In addition, they recognized that overage age, under-credited students generally fall behind early in their academic careers and once they do so, leave the school system quickly. To provide options for these students to re-enroll, if necessary, and complete their educations, the OMPG project has four components 1) Learning to Work, 2) Transfer High Schools, 3) Access GED Programs, and 4) Young Adult Borough Centers (YABCs). Learning to Work (LTW) is a workforce preparation component of the transfer schools, YABCs, and specific GED programs. The Transfer High Schools are small learning communities for overage, under-credited

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	16 and 17 year olds that are working towards obtaining a high school diploma. The YABCs are full-time, evening academic programs that are run in existing schools. The Access GED Programs are full-time GED programs that include age and culturally appropriate curricula, customized learning experiences, and LTW assistance, such as student support services and access to postsecondary training and employment. Link to resource: http://www.nyc.gov/html/ceo/downloads/pdf/appendixb_multiplepathways.pdf
Newport News Public Schools (Virginia)	Newport News Public Schools, has implemented innovative programs to help students transition to 9th grade as well as targeted programs to help students who have dropped out to re-enter school and complete their education. The Newport school system uses a three-tiered approach to addressing these issues—locating and re-enrolling students who have left school, identifying and providing support to students who are at risk of dropping out, and helping adults who do not have a diploma or GED earn a credential. The system has launched an intensive program to re-enroll dropouts, and since beginning these efforts in August 2007, has re-enrolled 240 former students. Over 50 of the students are back in the district's five high schools; 50 attend Point Option, an alternative program that is located at the New Horizon Education Center; and over 100 students have either taken or are preparing for tests to earn a GED. Earlier this year, Newport News Public Schools implemented a 5-week summer program to help 8th grade students who are at least 1 year older than their peers transition to the 9th grade. The program combines diagnostic testing and an emphasis on reading and math with high school orientation activities. Students and their parents were required to sign contracts to participate in the program, and students were required to attend the program every day and participate in assessments, activities, and assignments. The school system plans to track the students through their 9th grade year to determine if the program was beneficial. Links to resources: http://www.dailypress.com/news/dp-local_overage_0804aug04,0,442871,printstory http://www.dailypress.com/news/dp-news-nndropout_0128jan28,0,6723801.story
Renaissance Academy (Florida)	In 2007, the Duvall County School system identified 1,200 students in grades 11 and 12 who were at least 2 years behind. School administrators realized that the problem of overage students was an issue in the system's middle schools as well. At one school, Eugene Butler Middle School, nearly 40% of the students were overage and many had been held back two or more times. To address this issue, the school planned to open the Renaissance Academy as a school-within-a-school at Butler during the 2008-09 school year. The academy's focus will be on discipline, family services, and high expectations, and its purpose will be to allow overage students to complete school work at their own pace to gain promotion to the next grade level. The school board gave full support to the academy concept and planned to find additional middle and high schools to host similar programs. Link to resource: http://cgi.jacksonville.com/cgi-bin/printit.cgi?story=ZZNOSTORYZZ

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Title	**Description**
Star Academy Dropout Prevention and Acceleration Program (South Carolina)	Star Academy is a school-within-a-school program that serves at-risk 8th or 9th grade students who have failed one or two grades and are significantly behind their peers. The program provides an alternative to the traditional education setting, emphasizing innovative computer technology, hands-on projects, interactive learning activities, supportive teachers who serve as facilitators, teamwork skills, and relevant career-related projects. Students participate in a yearlong academic program of accelerated learning that enables them to complete the 8th and 9th grades in 1 academic year and move into a career and technology program in the 10th grade or other high school courses. Link to Web site: http://www.staracademyprogram.com/tabid/267/Default.aspx?art=1077
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (Wisconsin)	The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) supports a number of dropout prevention and recovery programs. These programs are designed to serve at-risk youths who may be 1 or more years behind their age group in the number of high school credits attained; 2 or more years behind their age group in basic skill levels; have discipline, behavior, or truancy problems; or are 8th grade students who scored below the basic level on the state-mandated examination or failed the examination and were not promoted to the 9th grade. Dropout prevention and recovery programs offered include those with credit recovery or credit acceleration components, "last-chance" programs, an employability skills certificate program, and two GED option programs. Link to state's alternative education Web site: http://www.dpi.wi.gov/alternativeed/alted.html

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