

# School Completion Toolkit

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# The NTACTION: C Graduation and Dropout Prevention (School Completion) Toolkit

## The NTACTION: C Toolkit Series

NTACTION: C hosts “toolkits” of resources on a variety of topics, related to secondary education and services for students with disabilities and the capacity building associated with improving such education and services. These toolkits provide an overview and then step-by-step guidance and resources on the specific topic. You'll find resources on content such as competitive integrated employment, or transition assessment; as well as strategies such as planning and implementing evaluation of your work, or hosting a transition fair. There are currently seven toolkits in the NTACTION: C Toolkit Series: [the NTACTION: C Age Appropriate Transition Assessment Toolkit](#), [NTACTION: C Competitive Integrated Employment Toolkit](#), [NTACTION: C Interagency Agreement Toolkit](#), [NTACTION: C Evaluation Toolkit](#), [NTACTION: C Transition Fair Toolkit](#), just to name a few.

The *NTACTION: C School Completion Toolkit* is intended as a resource that states, school districts, schools, parents, and other interested parties can use to gain a basic understanding of matters related to school dropout, graduation, recovery, reentry, and school completion in general. [Section 1](#) of the toolkit provides a basic introduction to school completion, providing some background and context for the rest of the toolkit. [Section 2](#) contains information about the predictors and practices related to school completion and quality transition programming. Each segment of Section 2 is organized to provide an overview, information about the core components, some school-based and home-based strategies to support the construct, and finally, a collection of links to resources which inform that facet of school completion. [Section 3](#) comprises a framework and process for developing, installing and implementing a local school-completion initiative. The [list of selected references](#) is organized by sections of the Toolkit.

## Section 1: Introduction to School Completion

### What is school completion?

For most youth, school completion means graduation with a “regular” diploma. The requirements for earning a regular diploma vary widely across states, particularly for [youth with disabilities](#). Some states offer multiple pathways to a single type of diploma. These often include a college-preparatory pathway and a vocational pathway of some sort. Other states offer multiple diplomas, which may include vocational or career diplomas as well as advanced, honors or Regents diplomas.

Another approach states take is to have a single pathway to graduation with a single type of diploma, but modify the requirements to earn that diploma. For these states the number of credit hours required to graduate may be reduced for particular students; some offer alternative courses and means of earning the subject area credits needed to graduate; others

lower the performance criteria for passing courses or required assessments; and yet others grant extensions in the time a student can take to complete the graduation requirements. In these states, recommendations or decisions regarding modified graduation requirements are usually made by an IEP team, a graduation team, or a school board.

Under the ESSA regulations, a few states are working on development of a [state-defined alternate diploma](#) for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities that is based on the state's standards for graduation with a regular diploma. Students receiving such an alternate diploma are considered to have graduated with a regular diploma and count as graduates under ESSA. Beginning in FFY 2020, however, the revised State Performance Plan Indicator B-1 (graduation rate) calculation, which is based on the 618 Exiting data, no longer counts state-defined alternate diploma recipients as graduates.

Once a child has received a state-approved alternate diploma, he or she will no longer be eligible to receive services under IDEA. NTACTION maintains a community of practice to support states in learning more about developing and implementing an alternate diploma. If you are interested in participating in NTACTION's community of practice, contact NTACTION at [ntact-collab@uncc.edu](mailto:ntact-collab@uncc.edu).

Graduation requirements (credit hours, graduation or end-of-course assessments, projects, etc.) also vary markedly across the states. The National Center on Educational Outcomes ([NCEO](#)) recently surveyed the 50 states and the District of Columbia about their graduation requirements and diploma options. Of the states that responded to the survey, 39 states specify a set of minimum graduation requirements and allow districts (LEAs) to add to them. Five states specify minimum requirements and do not allow LEAs to change or add to them. Finally, two states of the states that responded allow LEAs to set their own requirements. None of the states reported that they allow IEP teams to establish graduation requirements.

For youth who are not able to meet graduation requirements, some states offer a certificate of completion or attendance. Many states do not recognize these certificates and school boards are left to make these decisions. What many families don't understand is that certificates of this nature are generally not recognized as a true graduation credential by employers or postsecondary institutions. For students who receive a non-state-recognized certificate of completion and plan to enter postsecondary education or training, due to federal limitations, many are left without options for financial aid. Additionally, many employers do not recognize this as "graduation" from high school, thus limiting employment options for youth receiving this sort of credential.

For youth who have left school without graduating, the general education development (GED) is an academic-based credential that offers a standardized means of indicating a student has



academic proficiency on par with that of a high school graduate. Dropping out or obtaining a GED does not equate to graduation or negate a youth's ability to still seek a regular diploma. For as long as a youth is eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Act ([IDEA](#)), by law, they still have an option to attend school until age 21.

### **The core components of school completion**

So what impacts school completion and what evidence-based interventions are available that promote school completion, successful secondary transition and positive post-school outcomes? Successful school completion can depend on a broad array of factors. First and foremost are attendance, behavior, and course proficiency, often referenced as the ABCs of dropout prevention. In addition we know that student engagement, academics and career instruction, attendance, behavior, school climate, and family engagement are critically important, as is implementing high quality transition practices. If the educational and home environments address these factors positively and effectively, the odds are greatly improved that youth will stay in school and complete school.

The U.S. Department of Education's [What Works Clearinghouse](#) has a wealth of information about programs and interventions that are purported to impact these facets of school completion for youth with disabilities (<http://bit.ly/2DxtHVv> [Grad Interventions](#)). Additionally, Wilkins' and Huckabee's 2014 literature map contains information about the interventions available to support dropout prevention. Further, NTACTION has identified over 20 systems-level predictors of post-school success. Among these are inclusion in the general education curriculum; providing courses in career education and vocational education; opportunities for paid employment and other work experience; as well as instruction in self-determination and independent living. Additional information about the Predictors of Postschool Success is available on the NTACTION website at <https://transitionta.org/predictors-of-post-school-success/>.

### **Why school completion matters**

In general, students with disabilities have lower academic achievement, lower graduation rates, higher rates of suspension and expulsion, and ultimately higher dropout rates than their nondisabled peers. In schoolyear 2011-12, the adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) for students with disabilities was 61% compared to 80% for all students (Stetser, M., and Stillwell, R., 2014). In SY 2016-17, the mean ACGR for students with disabilities across the 60 US states and territories was 65.44%. The mean event dropout rate for students with disabilities was 3.74%. The combination of economic and social factors, as well as push and pull factors is exacerbated by a having a disability. Too often, these youth struggle in school and ultimately drop out.

Numerous researchers have highlighted the positive impact of successfully completing high school, as well as the negative consequences dropping out. The bottom line is that dropping out contributes to a reduced overall quality of life. Leaving school early precludes dropouts' access to academic, vocational, and social-skills instruction and interventions, as well as access to regular nutrition, positive peer and adult interaction, and the wrap-around services coordinated through the school and other state or community agencies. The consequences of this can be severe, particularly for youth with disabilities.

While the individual bears the greatest impact, the ramifications of dropping out can also affect the dropout's family, his or her community, and the ultimately the nation. Economically, dropouts are expensive: they tend to have an increased use of services (healthcare, law enforcement, food assistance, etc.) and generate less tax revenue for the state and nation, as they are often unemployed or underemployed. Data from the U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics showed that in 2017, the median weekly wage for people with less than a high school diploma was \$520, contrasted with \$712 per week with a high school diploma, \$774 with some college, but no degree, and \$836 with an associates degree. In September 2018, the unemployment rate for people with less than a high school diploma was 4.9% versus 3.5% for high school graduates and 3.1% for people with some college or an associate degree for the same period of time.

### **The current state of school completion for youth with disabilities**

Graduation and dropout rates for students with disabilities can be difficult to pin down, as there are numerous ways to calculate each. The 'standard' method for calculating the graduation rate for students with and without disabilities is the [four-year, adjusted-cohort method](#). This calculation begins the number of students who began high school four years ago and follows that 'cohort' of youth through their four years of school, adjusting up and down for incoming/outgoing transfers as well as students who die during the four-year period during which they would have attended high school.

This may seem straightforward, however it is not. As outlined earlier in this section, states may offer several types of diploma or certificate, or have various pathways leading to graduation. Some of these credentials are not equivalent to a regular diploma and do not count as graduation in the State's accountability measure for graduation rate. Additionally, credit and coursework requirements vary from state to state and can even differ among school districts within a single state. As reported in the State Performance Plans, Annual Performance Reports (SPP/APR), submitted to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) in early spring each year, the mean adjusted cohort graduation rate across the states, territories, BIE, and Washington, D.C. was 65.44% based on [data from the 2015-16 school year](#).

The calculation of dropout rates suffers from similar issues as those impacting graduation: multiple methods for calculating dropout, discrepancies in who is counted as a dropout, when dropout data are collected, etc. Probably the most consistent way of establishing dropout rates for students with disabilities is the method preferred by OSEP. This is a leaver type calculation that divides the number of dropouts in a year by the number of all students with disabilities who exited school during that year. The mean dropout rate for the 20 states that used this method for their [2015-16 school year data was 16.64%](#). The more prevalent event dropout rate calculation (used by 35 states), which divides the number of dropouts in a year by the number of students enrolled during that year, generates a prettier (read lower) dropout rate than OSEP's leaver calculation. The mean event dropout rate for the [2015-16 school year was 3.74%](#).

## **Section 2: Predictors and Practices Related to School Completion and Post-School Success**

In the years prior to NTACTION, the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) and the National Postschool Outcomes Center (NPSO) reviewed the correlational literature that examined transition-related factors and post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities and identified over 20 factors (“predictors/outcomes”) that are positively correlated with positive post-school outcomes for youth in the areas of postsecondary education or training, employment, and independent living. The presence of these factors in a youth's life improves his or her chances of success in the post-high school world. This section will discuss some of those predictors of post-school success.

### **I. Student engagement**

#### **The impact of student engagement on school completion**

Student engagement has been identified as a key factor to increase school completion and improve post-school outcomes (Finn, 2006). The construct of student engagement is still evolving, with debate about the key dimensions and indicators. Most agree that it is developed and reinforced by the presence of a strong and caring school community, rigorous and relevant instruction, and a positive school climate. NTACTION espouses the model put forth by Appleton, Christenson & Furlong Christianson (2008), which views student engagement as a multidimensional construct that comprises four equally important subtypes.

##### ***Academic engagement***

Student engagement can take the form of academic engagement: the student's focus on learning, time on task, completion of assignments, course completion, grades, credit accrual, and other matters related to the learning that goes on in school. Academic

engagement can be increased and fostered by sound instructional practices, quality instruction, various individual student supports, discussed later in this toolkit.

### ***Behavioral engagement***

A second facet of student engagement is behavioral engagement. Exhibiting good attendance, being prepared for and participating in class, following school and classroom rules, and generally “getting along well” in school are among the behaviors encompassed by this construct.

### ***Cognitive engagement***

Students who are cognitively engaged tend to exert extra effort to succeed academically and socially. They value learning, demonstrate self-regulation, set goals for their academic and general success, and exhibit self-determination and problem-solving skills.

### ***Affective/ Emotional engagement***

This facet of student engagement encompasses the student’s relationship and identification with the school and with the school community. Students who are affective engaged exhibit a sense of belonging through strong relationships with teachers and peers. They have a connection to the school through participation in various school and extracurricular activities and view themselves as active members of the school community.

Typically, indicators of students’ academic and behavioral engagement are readily available in school data systems; however, affective and cognitive engagement require input from teachers, parents, peers, or student self-report, as they are not regularly included in student data management systems.

## **Strategies to support student engagement**

### ***Systems-level strategies***

The school environment and climate should be one where the students feel safe, respected, and know they are accepted and that they belong. Student engagement can be positively influenced by programs put in place to improve relationships at school and increase the sense of belonging, accountability, motivation, efficacy, optimism, and effort. At a systems-level schools can focus on creating an atmosphere that is inviting to all students and their families. This can begin as simply as having a friendly face in the door of the school. It can make a great difference to a parent or visitor to the school if the first person they encounter is pleasant, welcoming and helpful. Focus on creating caring and connected environments by encouraging positive relationships between students and adults in the building.

Establish policies and procedures that set high expectations for all students while ensuring learning is relevant to them. When dealing with disciplinary issues, implement a system of culturally responsive positive behavioral interventions and supports and restorative practices. Finally, implement a full multi-tiered system of support at the secondary level.

### ***Classroom-level strategies to support student engagement***

Teachers play an important role in student engagement. Many have suggested proactive strategies to cultivate student motivation and engagement. The following are ideas to create an engaged classroom with many of the strategies supported by the strongest research evidence. While it is impossible to furnish an exhaustive list, links are provided for further exploration.

As a first step, creating an emotionally-safe classroom is critical by providing a foundation of a supportive, collaborative learning environment. It has also been suggested to create an intellectually-safe environment by beginning the first task of the day with a warm-up activity that 95 percent of the students can do without your help, followed by increasingly challenging activities. To build self-confidence, create a culture of effort and explanation rather than just right answers helping students to operate at a higher level of thinking. In addition, support students along the self-awareness to self-determination continuum by allowing choice, goal-setting, and reflection to raise awareness and intrinsic motivation.

When putting together the content for your classroom, build lessons that incorporate materials and examples that capture students' attention. Provide academic assignments and projects that are both challenging and relevant to your students. When practicable, offer students a measure of flexibility and choice in their projects, assignments, and activities. For many students, competency increases through the use of hands-on and project-based learning. In addition, give your students the opportunity to choose how you will assess their proficiency. Reinforce success and offer non-judgmental criticism, help, supports, and opportunities to reengage with tasks when students do not have initial success. When assessing student learning, give them an opportunity to provide you feedback in regards to effective teaching strategies, what worked and what didn't work for them, other content of interest, and setting goals for next time.

### ***Strategies for families***

Today's families often feel pulled in multiple directions and feel comfortable letting the school take the lead for education. Research shows that family expectations have a great influence the likelihood their child will complete school (Jeynes, 2007; Redd & Guzman, 2015; Fan, 2001). As a partner or family member, often you know more about your child than school staff ever will and you know what matters most to your child's well-being and

sense of place in the world. Setting high standards for your child and their schooling has a direct impact on what your child achieves. Families can support their child's school engagement in a variety of ways in the home and at school.

In the home, support your child with a place and time for homework, a positive vs. punitive approach to learning, read with your child, and talk about school activities. A major study of 25,000 children showed that parents talking with their child about school activities had a greater impact academically than monitoring homework, being at home after school, or limiting screen time. Set high but reasonable expectations for your child. Teach your child strong work habits and the value of persistence. Finally, when your child puts forth the right kind of effort and fails, don't punish that failure. Instead, teach your child how to deal with and learn from mistakes.

At school, as much as possible stay connected. Stay in communication with your child's teachers, attend meetings, volunteer when you can, and support your child's extracurricular interests. Being a parent can be challenging, especially when you have other commitments but the good news is that you don't need to be 'volunteer of the year.' Participating in school and community events builds stronger relationships between families, teachers, schools and communities. Engaging in opportunities together with your child can help model relationship skills and foster your child's sense of engagement.

### **Selected tools and resources to support student engagement**

- Measuring student engagement in upper elementary through high school: A description of 21 instruments <http://bit.ly/REL21instruments>
- University of Nebraska-Lincoln Student Engagement Project: Tiers <http://bit.ly/UNLTiers>

### **Research-based strategies that support student engagement**

- Check & Connect <http://checkandconnect.umn.edu/>

## **II. The core components related to academics and instruction**

Students must increasingly master academic content in order to graduate from high school. To master academic content, students must be engaged academically. As referenced previously in this toolkit, academic engagement refers to the student's focus on learning, time on task, completion of assignments, course completion, grades, credit accrual, and other matters related to the learning that goes on in school. Academic engagement is a key factor consistently cited as a major influence to students staying in school, progressing in school, and graduating on time. Most interventions for enhancing academic engagement and achievement encompass sound instructional practices, quality instruction, classroom structures, and various individual student supports to enhance students' substantive interaction.

Research on school completion identifies the following major recommendations related to academic engagement to support students' persisting in school and graduating.

**Provide academic support and enrichment to help students improve academic performance and reengage in school.**

Students who are in high school and are not on track to graduate may need additional opportunities outside regular school hours, such as after-school programs, Saturday school, and summer enrichment programs, where teachers can provide a personalized environment while helping students catch up on coursework and earn the credits they need to graduate. Providing academic supports, such as tutoring, academic enrichment and credit recovery, can help students catch up with work, improve their academic skills and increase their likelihood that they will pass the required courses and high school exit exams needed to graduate (Wilkins, 2011).

***Tutoring***

A systematic plan to help students reach proficiency levels in key academic areas can be an effective intervention if the student is struggling because something interrupted the delivery of the academic content the first time it was taught or if the content was missed altogether. For example, the student may have been absent from school when the content was initially introduced, or may have recently transferred from a school in which the content was not included in the curriculum. Among the features of tutoring programs associated with the most positive gains are extensive training for tutors, formal time commitments by tutors, structured tutoring sessions, careful monitoring of tutoring services, and close relationships between classroom instruction and curriculum and the tutoring services provided. Research also shows that tutoring is most effective when research-based teaching elements that improve student performance consistently are incorporated (e.g., modeling and guided practice, feedback and error correction, guided notes, timed trials, visual imagery, and progress monitoring data to adjust instruction). Tutoring can also lead to improvements in self confidence about reading, motivation for reading, and behavior.

Mentors who serve as adult advocates can also provide homework assistance, monitoring and support for youth showing signs of disengagement from school. The Check & Connect Intervention is an example of this type of mentoring. In ***Check & Connect***, the “**Check**” component refers to the process where mentors systematically monitor student performance variables (e.g., absences, tardiness, behavioral referrals, grades), while the “**Connect**” component refers to mentors providing personalized, timely interventions to help students solve problems, build skills, and enhance competence.

<http://www.checkandconnect.umn.edu/model/default.html>

### ***Academic enrichment***

Academic enrichment engages students in fun activities to extend what they already know or to enhance the educational learning being done in the classroom. Whenever possible, enrichment activities should be cross-curricular and consider the interests of the students. The activities themselves should try to promote critical thinking, listening, memorization, visualization, and concentration. Activities approach the varied interests of the students and may involve community-based trips, career exploration, science experiments, art activities, or focused programs. Enrichment programs are often interactive and project-focused. Enrichment activities can also support the development of leadership and social skills. These skills can help to build greater self-esteem and increase goal attainment in both current academic situations and in the pursuit of long-term careers. Service learning is an example of academic enrichment that helps students stay in school and graduate (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Wulsin, 2008). <https://www.civillc.com/education>

### ***Credit recovery***

Research has shown that students who miss or fail academic courses are at greater risk of dropping out of school than their peers. For this reason, students who fail courses need support to develop academic skills as well as accumulate credits. To re-engage these students, researchers recommend that schools provide extra academic support (Dynarski et al., 2008). Many schools are using credit recovery as one strategy to provide this support.

The most common definition of credit recovery is simply “a structured means for students to earn missed credit in order to graduate” (D’Agustino, 2013). Credit recovery allows students to earn high school Carnegie units that they have previously failed due to excessive absences, inability to grasp the content, or other factors associated with academic failure. Through a variety of formats (e.g., in school, online, mixed modes) and during differing times of day and year (e.g., normal school hours, after school, on vacation breaks, or over the summer), students can earn course credits to complete their diplomas or to avoid falling further behind in school. Optimal credit-recovery programs need to address the challenges that prevented students from previous success. This may include flexible pacing and schedules of instruction, adapting instructional methods and content to students’ level of skills, extra practice, and frequent assessments to inform instruction and to provide feedback to students. Credit recovery programs include both commercially developed programs and standalone programs developed by schools and school districts. Generally, students are eligible to enroll in credit recovery programs if they have met the “seat time” requirements for a course needed for graduation but have failed to meet the end-of-course standards required to receive credit. See Credit Recovery Programs: Recommendations for



Effective Implementation by Fetsco, Donnelly, & Tang, 2016. <https://in.nau.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2018/08/Research-in-Practice-Credit-Recovery-ek.pdf>

**Provide rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning and provide the skills needed to graduate and to assist students in achieving postsecondary options after they leave school.**

### ***Rigorous academic coursework***

Rigor of high school curriculum is one of the top indicators for whether a student will graduate from high school and earn a college degree. A rigorous high school curriculum should include challenging instruction and support for each student to meet high academic standards. Components of a rigorous high school curriculum include higher expectations for all students, with support for low-performing students through intervention programs and extended learning opportunities, and a requirement that each student complete a college- or work-ready curriculum in order to graduate from high school (Blackburn, 2013; Martinez, 2016).

### ***Course grades***

The grades a student earns are clearly related to the likelihood of his or her graduating successfully from high school. While course grades are predictive of graduating, course failures have a direct effect on graduation beyond their impact on the student's GPA. Ultimately, graduation from school is dependent upon accruing a sufficient number of academic credits. Poor academic performance and repeated academic failure have been documented as prime reasons that youth with and without disabilities do not graduate from high school. Falling behind with school work and being retained significantly increase students' likelihood of dropping out (Jimerson, Anderson, and Whipple, 2002). Researchers found that on-time graduation rates were higher for students who were on track for Grade 10 promotion than for those who were not. The on-track students had a Grade 9 GPA of 2.5 or higher, passed Algebra 1 with a C or higher by Grade 8, and failed one or fewer semester courses (Allensworth and Eason, 2007).

The freshman year is the most important year of high school, as it can set the tone for the remaining high school years. Strong students can quickly fall off track if they begin skipping classes and not completing homework. Conversely, students who struggled in elementary school can succeed in high school if they attend school every day, complete assignments and aspire to succeed.

The NTACTION matrix of Effective Practices and Predictors – Academic Skills contains links to a variety of effective practices and strategies for teaching math, reading, science and social

studies. It may be viewed and downloaded at <https://transitionta.org/effective-practices-and-predictors-in-secondary-transition-matrix/>. Over the past decade, The Institute of Educational Sciences through the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) conducted a number of research syntheses and developed practice guides of evidence-based recommendations on a number of academic concerns in education including algebra, writing, struggling adolescent readers, and school dropout. Some evidence-based strategies from these practice guides are found in Table 1.

### ***Career Skills***

One reason students lose interest in school is that what they are learning does not seem relevant to their lives. Taking vocational and career and technical education (CTE) courses is an effective way to engage students, as students learn real-world applications of their academic classes and have opportunities for field-based learning. The integration of these skills within a rigorous academic curriculum is another promising strategy to help students connect school to the rest of their lives. Schools must provide opportunities for students with disabilities to explore careers in a variety of settings so that students can make connections with people who know about job vacancies and employers who are open to hiring young people with disabilities (Trainor, Smith, & Kim, 2012). Solid academic preparation and work experiences are critically important in influencing school-to-work transition outcomes. In fact, work experience has been consistently identified as the most important predictor of post-school employment success for students with disabilities, regardless of disability or intensity of special education services (Carter et al., 2012; Fabian 2007; Test et al., 2009). For additional information and evidence-based and promising practices related to career skills and pre-employment skills, check out NTACTION's Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) Toolkit [https://transitionta.org/toolkit\\_cie/](https://transitionta.org/toolkit_cie/) and Work-Based Learning Module.

### ***Relevant Learning Opportunities***

Research shows that creating multiple pathways to graduation through a variety of learning opportunities provides students with a meaningful high school structure that links subject areas and encompasses both personal experiences and connections to the world of adult work. Several states have adopted this approach, among them, [New York](#), [Vermont](#) and Louisiana. Relevant learning opportunities may include in-depth projects that take place both in the classroom and the workplace as well as internships or community partnerships that provide students with a vision of their future and an understanding of how their school work is linked to what they will do after graduation.

**Table 1**

**Evidence Based Recommendations to Promote Academic Performance in Core Areas**

<b>Content Area</b>	<b>Instructional Recommendations</b>	<b>Level of Evidence/ Effectiveness</b>
<b>Algebra</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use solved problems to engage students in analyzing algebraic reasoning.</li> <li>2. Teach students to utilize the structure of algebraic representations.</li> <li>3. Teach students to intentionally choose from alternative algebraic strategies when solving problems.  <a href="https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/practiceguide/wwc_algebra_summary_072115.pdf">https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/practiceguide/wwc_algebra_summary_072115.pdf</a> </li> </ol>	<p>Minimal</p> <p>Minimal</p> <p>Moderate</p>
<b>Writing/ Composition</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explicitly teach appropriate writing strategies using a Model-Practice-Reflect instructional cycle.</li> <li>2. Integrate writing and reading to emphasize key writing features.</li> <li>3. Use assessments of student writing to inform instruction and feedback.  <a href="https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/22">https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/22</a> </li> </ol>	<p>Strong</p> <p>Moderate</p> <p>Minimal</p>
<b>Adolescent Reading</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide explicit vocabulary instruction.</li> <li>2. Provide direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction.</li> <li>3. Provide opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation.</li> <li>4. Increase student motivation and engagement in literacy learning.</li> <li>5. Make available intensive and individualized interventions for struggling readers that can be provided by trained specialists.  <a href="https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/adlit_pg_082608.pdf#page=22">https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/adlit_pg_082608.pdf#page=22</a> </li> </ol>	<p>Strong</p> <p>Strong</p> <p>Moderate</p> <p>Moderate</p> <p>Strong</p>

Content Area	Recommendation	Level of Evidence/ Effectiveness
<b>Preventing Dropout in Secondary Schools</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide intensive, individualized support to students who have fallen off track and face significant challenges to success.</li> <li>2. Engage students by offering curricula and programs that connect schoolwork with college and career success and that improve students' capacity to manage challenges in and out of school.</li> <li>3. For schools with many at-risk students, create small, personalized communities to facilitate monitoring and support <a href="https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/practiceguide/wwc_dp_summary_101717.pdf">https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/practiceguide/wwc_dp_summary_101717.pdf</a></li> </ol>	<p>Moderate</p> <p>Strong</p> <p>Moderate</p>
<b>Dropout Prevention</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide academic support and enrichment to improve academic performance. Tutoring, strategy instruction, enrichment, credit recovery</li> <li>2. Rigorous and relevant instruction in academic and career skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide academic content in a variety of formats: online or blended learning options</li> <li>- Integrate academic content with career and skill-based themes through career academies and other multiple pathways models are key strategies that support school completion.</li> <li>- Provide students with the necessary skills to complete high school and by introducing students to postsecondary options.</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p><a href="https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/9">https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/9</a></p>	<p>Moderate</p> <p>Moderate</p>

### ***Tailored learning environments***

One of the most important things a teacher can do is provide a positive learning environment. The learning environment in a classroom is vital to student success and impacts students in many ways. When teachers maintain a positive learning environment, or one that allows students to feel comfortable and confident as learners, student achievement is enhanced. Those bright posters, organized spaces, and cooperative learning arrangements aren't an accident. The use of space includes how furniture is arranged and organized, how materials are stored and maintained, how clean the classroom is and the overall color and brightness. A negative learning environment, or setting that adversely affects student learning, can affect students in many ways, such as low student achievement, poor behavior, student anxiety, or depression.

### ***Effective Instruction***

Effective instruction is the systematic planning, managing, delivery, and evaluation of content necessary for mastery within a general area of knowledge. All teachers need to plan, manage, deliver, and evaluate their instruction, whether they are working with students who are gifted, students with disabilities, or students without special needs. Effective instruction has the following features: 1) explicit instruction: overtly teaching each step through teacher modeling and many examples; 2) systematic instruction: breaking lessons and activities into sequential, manageable steps that progress from simple to more complex concepts and skills; 3) ample practice opportunities: providing many opportunities for students to respond and demonstrate what they are learning; and 4) immediate feedback: incorporating feedback (from teacher or peers) during initial instruction and practice. The principles of effective instruction have been identified from three major sources: research in cognitive science, research on master teachers and research on cognitive supports. The following is a list of these principles provided by Rosenshine, 2012.

Begin lesson with a short review of previous learning

- Present new materials in small steps with student practice after each step.
- Ask large numbers of questions and check responses of all students
- Provide models
- Guide student practice
- Check for student understanding
- Obtain high success rates
- Provide scaffolds for difficult tasks
- Require and monitor independent practice
- Engage students in weekly and monthly reviews.

These ideas are described in detail in Principles of Instruction: Research-Based Strategies that all Teachers Should Know.

<https://www.aft.org//sites/default/files/periodicals/Rosenshine.pdf>

See too the NTACTION lesson plan starters at

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/National-Technical-Assistance-Center-On-Transition>.

Two highly effective instructional delivery practices that increase academic performance, especially for students with disabilities are instructional scaffolding and peer tutoring. The remainder of this section will address these practices.

### ***Instructional Scaffolding***

Scaffolding refers to a process in which teachers add supports for students to enhance learning and aid in the mastery of tasks. The goal of instructional scaffolding is to systematically build on students' experiences and knowledge as they are learning new skills. Instructional scaffolding can be used in almost any instructional area (i.e., language arts, science, math, history) and across age groups to teach skills. Scaffolding can also be combined with other successful instructional techniques, such cooperative and peer assisted learning. Instructional scaffolding serves as a vehicle for guided practice and differentiated instruction. There are three major types of instructional scaffolding: content scaffolding, task scaffolding and materials scaffolding.

#### **Content scaffolding**

For this type of scaffolding, the teacher selects content that is not too difficult or unfamiliar for students learning a new skill. Doing so allows students to focus on the skill being taught and not get bogged down in the content. Teachers should begin with highly interesting content that is easy to learn so the students can experience success and gain confidence, then gradually increase the difficulty of the content. Scaffolds should be gradually removed (faded) as the student gains mastery of the content.

#### **Task scaffolding**

In this type of scaffolding, a teacher begins by specifying the steps in a task or instructional strategy. He or she then models the steps in the task, verbalizing his or her thought processes for the students. In other words, the teacher thinks aloud and talks through each of the steps he or she is completing. Once students understand the steps in the task or instructional strategy, they practice the task independently.

## **Material scaffolding**

This type of scaffolding involves the use of written prompts or cues to help the students perform a task or use a strategy. This may take the form of cue sheets that list the steps necessary to perform a task. Students can use these as a reference to reduce confusion and frustration. Ideally, the prompts and cues should be faded over time as students master the steps of the task or strategy.

## ***Peer tutoring***

Peer tutoring has been used across academic subjects and has been found to result in improvement in academic achievement for a diversity of learners within a wide range of content areas. Common components of peer tutoring programs facilitate both cognitive and social gains in both higher-performing mentors and low-performing mentees in an individualized and positive way. Peer tutoring has been found to have positive effects on mathematics performance, competency in reading across all ages and self-concept. It accommodates diverse students within a classroom and promotes higher order thinking skills. Peer tutoring also facilitates differentiated learning in the classroom without stigmatizing or alienating students. When peer tutoring is implemented in a class-wide setting, students are able to approach the curriculum at their individual learning level, using strategies tailored to individual mentees.

## **Selected tools and resources to support academics and instruction**

### ***Videos***

“RIGOR 5 Strategies for increasing Rigor in Your Classroom” by Barbara R. Blackburn.

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Rigor+in+Instruction&&view=detail&mid=16042986676E55DCB94B16042986676E55DCB94B&&FORM=VRDGAR>

“Supporting Struggling Students with Rigorous Instruction” with Dr. Robyn Jackson.

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Rigor+in+Instruction&&view=detail&mid=95E03B4640FBD1CFCB5F95E03B4640FBD1CFCB5F&&FORM=VRDGAR>

### ***Other resources***

**Beginner's Guide to Rigor:** a free, self-paced online course that comprises a series of four modules based on the guide Bringing Literacy Strategies into Content Instruction: Professional Learning for Secondary-Level Teachers.

<http://www.barbarablackburnonline.com/free-resources/resource-guides/>

***The Center on Instruction:*** <http://www.centeroninstruction.org/index.cfm> ***Online Course:***  
***Bringing Literacy Strategies into Content Instruction: Professional Learning for Secondary-Level Teachers***

**College and Career Standards:** <https://www.ed.gov/k-12reforms/standards>

**College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education:**  
<http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/CCRStandardsAdultEd.pdf>

The IRIS Center. (2005). *Providing instructional supports: Facilitating mastery of new skills*. Retrieved on [April 25, 2018] from <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/sca/>

**Common Core State Standards Initiative:** <http://www.corestandards.org/>

Features of Effective Instruction. Building RTI Capacity. The Meadows Center. Retrieved 06/02/2018 from:  
[http://buildingrti.utexas.org/sites/default/files/presentations/Effective\\_Instruction.pdf](http://buildingrti.utexas.org/sites/default/files/presentations/Effective_Instruction.pdf)

The Georgia Credit Recovery Program is one of the most comprehensive programs in the US. It can serve as a great model for other states and districts.  
<http://www.gacreditrecovery.org/>

**Innovative State Approaches to Implementing CCR Standards Webinar:**  
<http://lincs.ed.gov/professional-development/resource-collections/profile-891>

*Teaching Strategies for Improving Algebra Knowledge in Middle and High School Students Practice Guide Summary*. (2015) What Works Clearinghouse.  
[https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/wwc\\_algebra\\_summary\\_072115.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/wwc_algebra_summary_072115.pdf)

### **III. Student behavior and school discipline**

#### **An introduction to student behavior and school discipline and its impact on school completion**

The goal of school discipline is to create a safe environment where teachers can teach and every student is given the opportunity to learn. Research has shown that student behavior can positively or negatively impact learning in the classroom, and vice versa (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Teacher expectations about student behavior and their response to behavioral concerns, if given appropriate consideration, can ultimately help to sustain the integrity of the educational space required to promote post-school success for all students, but specifically culturally and linguistically diverse students with and at risk for disabilities.

Defining student behavior is much more complex than is often understood. In a broad sense, it is often treated as a dichotomy between *desired* behavior and *problem* behavior. Following directions, staying on-task, and remaining engaged are student behaviors that can foster a positive learning environment that promotes the facilitation of student learning. These, and similar types of desired behaviors, are closely associated with student achievement (e.g.,



attending school, getting good grades, school completion, and college/career readiness). To encourage and reinforce desired behavior, teachers reward students that comply with behavioral expectations, but punish those that fail to conform as a means of deterring undesirable conduct. Students that are perceived as noncompliant are a distraction to the education of others. They disrupt instructional time and impede the learning process, which negatively affects each student in the class. To extinguish problem behavior teachers often sanction students by removing them from the classroom through the use of disciplinary exclusion (i.e., suspension and expulsion). Although student removal is intended to reinforce desired behaviors and preserve the learning environment, overreliance on school suspension and expulsion has proven to be ineffective and detrimental to academic success (Hemphill, Toumbourou, Herrenkohl, McMorris, & Catalano, 2006).

Because behavioral expectations vary greatly by teacher, there is a certain degree of subjectivity that is naturally involved when determining if a problem behavior requires the removal of a student from the classroom. Misinterpretations and assumptions about student behavior increase the potential for teacher bias in the administration of school discipline. Research cites students with and at risk for disabilities, as well as, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as the two major groups most disproportionately impacted by discretionary referrals for disciplinary action (Skiba, 2002). These students, in comparison to others, receive harsher punishment oftentimes for the same or similar types of behaviors—many of which are relatively minor and nonviolent (e.g., defiance, disrespect, noncompliance, etc.). Together, suspension and expulsion exacerbate a student’s risk of academic failure (e.g., grade retention, absenteeism, and school disengagement) and accelerate the dropout process; making them especially vulnerable to overrepresentation in detention and correctional facilities (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010). The strong relationship between dropping out of school and incarceration, traces a clear and direct path from school to prison for these groups of students.

### **The core components of student behavior**

Reconciling the disproportionate removal of students from the classroom is a collaborative and inclusive process. To achieve greater consistency and equity in disciplinary practices, schools and families should attempt to: build positive student-teacher relationships; enhance parent-teacher collaboration and communication; and foster an inclusive and caring learning environment with high expectations. Understanding how *relationships, collaboration and communication, and teaching and pedagogy* inform student behavior can help to mitigate the negative consequences of school discipline for students with and at risk for disabilities and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. These three (3) core components of student behavior are further explained below:

### ***Relationships***

Positive teacher-student relationships are critical to effective teaching and learning. Students who feel respected and valued tend to have better academic outcomes and fewer behavioral problems. Teachers that take the time to get to know their students' interests and backgrounds demonstrate that they not only care about their students' academic progress, but that they are equally concerned about their personal well-being.

The foundation of this connectedness is nurtured through mutual listening and sharing. Teachers should have a willingness to hear and affirm what students have to say, whether they agree with them or not, if their desire is to form a personal bond. Studies have shown that students improve academically when classrooms are constructed to value student voice. Teachers that actively and intentionally listen to their students promote a climate of trust and respect. Students will often work hard and pay attention to teachers they like and perceive as helpful. Additionally, teachers should be willing to share appropriate aspects about their own lives with their students. When teachers open up to students they create opportunities to discover shared interests. In instances where students and teachers give the appearance of being descriptively mismatched (e.g., race, ethnicity, culture, and/or ability), having shared experiences may bring to surface commonalities between them that would otherwise not be readily apparent.

Developing teacher-student relationships is a proactive approach to minimizing problem behaviors. When teachers know their students it significantly reduces the likelihood that they'll misinterpret their actions and dispositional attitudes. Having positive teacher-student interactions also heighten awareness of what disciplinary responses work best with each individual student. This responsiveness works to mitigate the reoccurrence of problem behaviors that would continuously disrupt the learning environment in the absence of a strong relationship.

*Building positive student-teacher relationships* does not happen immediately. It will take time to establish. In the beginning, students may seemingly be reluctant or even skeptical about the idea of bonding with their teachers; but overtime, with consistency and patience, interactions between teachers and students should improve. Supportive relationships are transformative. If appropriate time and effort is given to develop real relationships it has the potential to shift the dynamics of a classroom in positive and meaningful ways that make teaching and learning possible.

### ***Collaboration/Communication***

Families can be extremely influential in improving academic achievement and post-school success. The educational benefits of their involvement are considered substantial. When

parents and/or guardians actively participate in the education process, research shows that students generally have increased achievement, more positive attitudes, and fewer behavioral problems (LaRocque, 2013).

Parental involvement is often difficult to define as it is not the same for everyone. How parents/guardians choose to participate in their child's education varies widely. Traditional forms of involvement, such as, volunteering at school, attending school functions, or regularly making visits to the classroom may be particularly challenging for parents/guardians of students with disabilities, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It should not be assumed that decreased participation in these more traditional forms of involvement equal a lack of interest or disregard for education. Many parents/guardians have a strong desire to be involved (Crozier, 1999); but feelings of isolation and exclusion, due to language barriers and/or subtle or direct discrimination, limits their participation in schools.

Albeit difficulty to define, parental involvement is not unidimensional. It is a collaborative process that requires two-way communication between teachers and parents/guardians. Teachers who recognize the importance of viewing parents as partners look for ways to engage them in their child's education. They invite parents/guardians to share information and resources relevant to their child's specific and unique academic needs. Teachers then use this information to structure their instruction in a way that is intended to engage diverse student groups. Additionally, teachers who partner with parents/guardians also invite them to share any emotional or behavioral challenges that their child may face. In obtaining this information teachers make clear their willingness to include parents/guardians in the disciplinary decision making process. Rooted in the assumption that parents/guardians are the experts of their own children, teachers may consider soliciting them for disciplinary input to inform their discipline responses to student behavior. This input aids teachers in developing an effective and impartial discipline plan that is more solution-oriented than punitive.

*Enhancing teacher collaboration and communication* is important to student success. This is especially true for students with disabilities and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Teaching does not occur in isolation. Educating a child is a shared responsibility. In order to be effective teachers must be willing to partner with parents. Parents/guardians need to feel included. Their input about their child matters and should be welcomed and encouraged consistently and on an ongoing basis. Bridging communication gaps between home (teachers) and school (parents/guardians) can

positively impact the learning environment, as well as, guide and support student learning and development (Epstein, 2001).

### ***Teaching and Pedagogy***

The expression, *students do not care what you know, until they know that you care*; has been largely supported by pedagogical research (Gay, 2000; Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Noddings, 1992). When the curriculum is inclusive and teachers hold all students to high expectations they in turn demonstrate that they care about diversity and believe that all students can learn. This student-centered approach to teaching and pedagogy is described as culturally responsive. Teachers that take aspects of a students' life (i.e., culture, race/ethnicity, individuality, home environment, and lived experiences) to guide both *what* they teach (teaching) and *how* they teach (pedagogy) can significantly improve student learning. Designing curriculum and instruction that is relevant leads to active and meaningful engagement with the subject matter; especially content that is considered academically rigorous. Studies show the use of culturally responsive practices help to narrow the achievement gap and effectively address the disproportionate representation in school discipline among culturally and linguistically diverse students with and at risk for disabilities.

The primary goal of cultural responsiveness is to help all students succeed. This can be done using two separate practices. Culturally responsive teaching is one practice. It is intended to help students succeed academically. Another practice is culturally responsive classroom management. It is more oriented toward student behavioral success. Although these two practices are intrinsically linked; they are nonetheless distinct.

Culturally responsive teaching is grounded in the premise that culture influences the way that students learn. Creating culturally inclusive classrooms and setting high expectations are therefore necessary to ensure students succeed academically. Teachers who are culturally responsive will build bridges between students' home culture and the culture of the school. They acknowledge that students already possess a breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding that can be practically leveraged and used as assets, rather than detriments, to teaching and learning. It is often thought that the inclusion of students' cultural knowledge, voice, prior experiences, and diverse learning styles within the curriculum comes at the expense of academic rigor. This is not true. In fact, cultural inclusion aids in the development of critical thinking, which makes it possible (and more likely) for students to process, absorb, and learn new and challenging course content. Inclusive classrooms when combined with high expectations contribute to overall student growth and is seen as vital to efforts to close the achievement gap. Holding students

accountable for producing high-quality work affirms the belief that all students have the capacity to learn and the potential to be academically successful.

Culturally responsive classroom management is grounded in the premise that expectations of student behavior are culturally influenced (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, Curran, 2004). Though schools are becoming increasingly diverse, the cultural composition of the teaching force remains relatively heterogeneous. Given the cultural mismatch between students and teachers, it is not uncommon for teachers to misread the behaviors of culturally and linguistically diverse students with and at risk for disabilities. Misinterpretations of student behavior and unclear and inconsistent behavioral expectations have largely contributed to disproportionate representation in school discipline among these groups. Culturally responsive classroom management is an important practice that can be used to achieve greater equity in the administration of school discipline. It is a pedagogical approach that espouses the belief that student behavior is best 'managed' by teachers when they develop a caring classroom environment. Teachers that practice culturally responsive classroom management will avoid using control and fear of punishment to reinforce desired behaviors. Instead, they balance their authority with compassion; they are firm, yet respectful. They value relationships over rules and begin each new day with a clean slate. Students are given opportunities every day to make better decisions without being judged by their past mistakes. Teachers establish clear behavioral expectations and strive to build community by encouraging students to have an appreciation for diversity and respect for difference and individuality.

Culturally responsive classroom management and culturally responsive teaching, though separate and distinct practices, operate in a concerted manner. Together they *foster an inclusive and caring learning environment* that establishes high, clear, and consistent academic and behavioral expectations. Culturally responsive practices, when used as an approach to teaching and pedagogy, support the belief that all students have the capacity to learn and the potential to succeed. Engaging in these practices can help shrink the achievement gap and make school discipline more equitable, particularly with regard to culturally and linguistically diverse students with and at risk for disabilities.

### **Teacher-based strategies to support student behavior**

- **Identify shared interests**

Teachers and students might not share physical character traits, but they may be alike in other ways. Talking and listening to students, and allowing them to ask questions, will aid both the teacher and student in identifying shared interests. Because teachers expect students to share aspects of their life with them, they should be prepared to do the same. Through this openness a mutual respect and trust is established.

- **Consult with parents/guardians**

Parents/guardians often know more about their child than anyone. Teachers should leverage parental expertise by consulting with parents/guardians about a student's academic and behavioral needs. Knowing what works, and what does not work, with individual students will ensure adequate and appropriate consideration is given when interacting with students. When teachers seek advice from parents/guardians and allow them to participate in decision-making, academic and disciplinary interventions designed to support teaching and learning are more effective.

- **Use disciplinary exclusion as a last resort**

When a student is removed from the classroom their opportunity to engage in the learning process is severely limited. Classroom exclusion is detrimental to a student's achievement and socioemotional development. Given its negative consequences, teachers should seek alternatives to school suspension and expulsion when addressing undesired behavior. Disciplinary exclusion, particularly for minor, non-violent offenses, should be avoided whenever possible and used only as a last resort.

- **Make teaching and learning student-centered**

What teachers teach and how they teach should be relevant and meaningful; since not all students learn the same. Connecting instructional materials and resources to students' experiences, culture, and prior knowledge will help them to engage with challenging or difficult subject matter that would otherwise seem disconnected and irrelevant to their own lives. Using differentiated pedagogical approaches, to accommodate different learning styles, makes teaching and learning fun and practical; keeping students' attention so that they can remain engaged.

- **Encourage and affirm Students**

Teachers that set high and clear academic and behavioral expectations show their students that they care about their academic and personal well-being. Students who receive consistent and ongoing encouragement and affirmation from their teachers tend to do better in school and have greater confidence in comparison to students who are frequently criticized and reprimanded. Telling students "good job," "give me your best," "you can do it," encourages them to maximize their full potential while increasing the likelihood that they will produce high-quality academic work.

### **Strategies for families to support student behavior**

- **Ask questions**

Parents/guardians should see themselves as partners in their child's education. Everyone has the same goal; to ensure that the child succeeds in, and outside of, school.

Parents should not feel intimidated when speaking, or meeting, with school officials. When information about their child is communicated in a way that is unclear, or if access to certain information appears to be unavailable to the parent; they should speak up and ask questions. Writing a note, sending an email, and/or requesting a meeting (in-person or by phone) directly with the teacher are strategies that parents can use to get an accurate understanding about their child's day-to-day academic and behavioral experiences. Parents should avoid relying solely on third-party information; that is, information communicated by persons with limited or indirect involvement in the child's educational development. When communication between the parent and teacher is clear and direct; parents/guardians feel included and, in turn, have the knowledge and understanding that they need to actively participate in the education of their child.

- **Share information and provide input**

Parents/guardians should be prepared to volunteer information about their children; whether this information is solicited or unsolicited by the teacher. When parents share information related to what their child's likes and dislikes, their fears and anxieties, prior experiences, and their dreams and future aspirations; teachers are better equipped to personalize their instruction in ways that make teaching and learning relevant and meaningful to the student. Parents/ guardians should also provide input when decisions are being made relative to interventions designed to address their child's academic or behavioral performance. Oftentimes strategies that parents use with their child can be adapted by teachers (when appropriate) to establish greater continuity between home and school. Parents/guardians should be intentional about sharing information and providing input to teachers to help create more positive schooling experiences for their child.

- **Balance healthy criticism with positivity**

Children listen to what parents say and will use what they have heard in forming their impressions of others. This is why it is important for parents/guardians to pay close and careful attention to what they discuss, in front of their child, as it concerns their teacher. A child that hears their parent/guardian speaking negatively about their teacher will often have congruent attitudes. Teachers are not perfect. Like most people, they are susceptible to making mistakes. When this happens, having a balance of healthy criticism with positivity can prevent children from being conflicted, or indifferent, about the relationship they have with their teacher. Speaking objectively, avoiding personal attacks, and giving equal attention to what teachers are doing well allows students to form their own opinions about their teachers based on their direct interactions.

- **Facilitate student interinvolvement**

Parents/guardians are strongly encouraged by teachers to participate in school activities. There is nothing to suggest that parents cannot, or should not, invite teachers to attend events for their child that occur outside of normal school hours. This is known as interinvolvement. Relationships between parents/guardians/children and teachers should, in effect, be reciprocal. If parents show that they care about their child's education by becoming involved at school; teachers should also show a similar level of care by becoming involved in their students' life outside the classroom. Inviting teachers to attend sports activities, participate in community events, and/or join their social networks, are all ways that parents/guardians can facilitate interinvolvement from teachers. This connectedness helps to strengthen relationships, build community, and sustain authentic two-way partnerships between parents and teachers.

- **Encourage and affirm your child**

Occasionally there will be times that students are placed with teachers that are unable to meet their individual needs. When this occurs, parents/guardians must be prepared to provide additional encouragement and affirmation for their child, on top of what is already expected. A child that receives some praise may benefit more socioemotionally, than one who receives no praise. Families that are able to inspire and uplift their children—in some ways—combat the negative effects of the absence of a caring and supportive learning environment.

### **Tools and resources to support student behavior and school discipline**

Restorative practices: Fostering healthy relationships and promoting positive discipline in schools: [www.otlcampaign.org/restorative-practices](http://www.otlcampaign.org/restorative-practices)

Restorative justice (Oakland Unified School District): <https://www.ousd.org/Domain/134>

Foundations for implementation: Culturally responsive PBIS (Florida Positive Behavioral Interventions & Support Project): <http://flpbis.cbcs.usf.edu/foundations/CR-PBIS.html>

Back-to-basics on Part B disproportionate representation: What you need to know about indicators B9 and B10 (Bitterman & Crain, 2017): [https://ideadata.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2017-09/final\\_ppt.pdf](https://ideadata.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2017-09/final_ppt.pdf)

PBIS culturally responsiveness field guide: Resources for trainers and coaches (Milaney, L., Smith, K., McIntosh, K., Rose, J. & Pinkelman, S., 2016):

<https://www.pbis.org/resource/pbis-cultural-responsiveness-field-guide-resources-for-trainers-and-coaches>



Culturally responsive classroom management strategies (Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, 2008):

<https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/uploads/005/121/Culturally%20Responsive%20Classroom%20Mgmt%20Strat2.pdf>

Culturally responsive pedagogy: Towards equity and inclusivity in Ontario schools. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013):

[http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/cbs\\_responsivepedagogy.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/cbs_responsivepedagogy.pdf)

#### **IV. Attendance**

##### **Why attendance matters**

Absences, whether excused or unexcused, have the same impact on students. When students miss school, they are denied exposure to academic and affective instruction as well as opportunities to engage and participate in the school community. The negative impact of frequent absence in preschool and elementary school years can extend into high school. Erlich, Gwynn, et.al. (2013) found that students who were chronically absent during this period of their schooling tend to have problems with truancy and with academics when they get to high school.

One study of ninth graders documented that of the students who missed between zero and four days of school per semester, 87% graduated in four years. The same study showed that of the students who missed between five and nine days per semester, only 63% graduated within four years. Missing 10 to 14 days per semester lowered that percentage to 41% (Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

Students who are absent 10% or more of school time (about 9 days per semester) are considered chronically absent. While nearly all schools monitor overall attendance rates, many still do not track the number of students who are chronically absent, though this is changing as more states adopt chronic absence as their indicator of school quality or student success for their [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) plans.

At best, chronically absent students end up leaving school under-skilled and unprepared for life afterward. Many of them fail core classes, score poorly on standardized tests and are, consequently, retained one or more grades because they are academically unprepared to do the work required of them. At worst, these youth drop out of school and suffer the various negative consequences, including poor health, greatly reduced earning potential, and life choices that often result in incarceration.

Regular attendance is necessary for students to learn and thrive in school. Attendance alone, however, is not adequate. If a student is to succeed in school, he or she must also be actively engaged in learning and participating. Nonetheless, getting students to school is the first step.

### **Strategies families can use to support their child's attendance**

- Ensure that your child gets to school every day and is on time. Frequent absences as early as preschool can have a lasting and negative effect on your child's success throughout the rest of their years in school.
- Talk with your child about attendance, stress that you think it is important.
- Take an interest in your child's schoolwork and activities at school. Talk about his or her day after school.
- Provide quiet time and a distraction-free area where your child can do homework so he or she is prepared for the next day.
- If your child does not want to go to school, ask why this is so. Talk through the reason(s) and try to help solve the problem. If necessary, talk with school personnel and discuss ways to address the problem if it is school-based.
- Keep the school informed about home matters that impact your child's attendance.
- Talk with your child's teachers about class attendance for each class. If there are problems, work with the teacher and school to identify and address the causes of the problems. Don't wait until your child is chronically absent and in danger of being officially sanctioned by the school.

### **School-based strategies to support attendance**

- Message everyone (all students, parents, staff, and the community) that every day of school counts and that every absence hurts. Family outreach is important in matters of attendance, as families may not realize the impact that regular attendance and, conversely, absence can have on their child's success in school.
- Every time a child is absent, communicate with the student and the family. Follow up via a post card, note, call, email, text, and/or face-to-face meeting with the student and the family. Communication with the family is important, because parents or guardians may be unaware that their child has been absent from school.
- Recognize good as well as improved attendance. Reinforce this with the student and family. Don't restrict communications with parents to negative topics... let them know when their child has done well!
- Examine and act on school attendance and absence data, answering at least the following questions:
  - Who is absent (or tardy)?
  - How many students are missing 5% of school; 10%; over 10%?
  - Are there patterns in absences for individuals or groups (particular days, times, classes, etc.)?
  - What is causing the patterns in the data?
  - What steps will help address the attendance problems in our school?
- When an individual student has an attendance problem, talk with the student and work with the family and teacher(s) to understand why. Then focus on how to address the root cause. Don't forget to look at transportation, scheduling, and family commitments.
- When a group of students has a common attendance issue, look at the data for causes and talk with the students to find the cause.

## **Interventions to support attendance**

To meet state and federal regulations and most critically, for the good of the students, schools should monitor attendance constantly at both the school level and the individual student level. It is critical to identify and intervene with the students who are at risk of dropping out, as indicated by chronic absence. Students with borderline poor attendance can be supported through programs targeted at increasing their engagement and academic success in school. In addition, it is beneficial to implement school-wide attendance strategies that support and reward good (and improved) attendance for all students. Implementing universal attendance programs can help reduce the number of students who might require more intensive attendance interventions later if nothing is done.

Universal, school-level interventions, that benefit everyone, can be inexpensive and relatively easily implemented programs. They might include rewards or incentives, though these need not be expensive. Recognition of good or improved attendance can be accomplished via a bulletin board or poster, offering a reserved table in the cafeteria, a breakfast with the principal, a pizza party for the class with the best attendance, etc. We know of some schools that have partnered with businesses in their community to provide modest rewards for students with perfect or even improved attendance. Balu & Erlich (2018) discuss some considerations for designing and implementing incentive-based interventions to support good attendance.

At the targeted level, work with group(s) of students who are having attendance problems to identify common issues hindering attendance. Reasons for not attending school include health issues (more common in lower grades than high school), low school engagement, poor school climate, transportation difficulties, family problems or responsibilities, and pull-out factors, such as gang membership. A creative approach may be required to overcome the issue or issues; however, knowing the reason or reasons behind nonattendance will increase the likelihood of success in getting students to attend school regularly. Talk with the students and work to identify and implement supports and interventions that will help address the cause of the absences.

Intensive interventions are implemented for the students of highest need and are the most time and cost intensive. An example of an intensive intervention is the Check & Connect program, in which a student is assigned an adult mentor, who meets with the student regularly, and monitors and follows up on completion of assignments, grades, attendance and other issues particular to the student. This is an evidence-based program, having sufficient research evidence to demonstrate that it works effectively in increasing attendance, student engagement and school completion, and reduces truancy, behavioral referrals and dropout rates.

## Tools and resources to support attendance

*Attendance Works*: A website that has a wealth of information, strategies and tools to support good attendance. website: <http://www.attendanceworks.org>

Attendance/absence calculators: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/tools-for-calculating-chronic-absence/>

Infographic on the impact of attendance in the early grades:  
<http://attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/AW-Infographic-2.12.1311.pdf>

REL West Data Visualization Infographic:  
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/Publications/Details/257>

*NDPC-SD Dropout Data Tools* (This set of Excel-based tools lets a school disaggregate and examine its data, including attendance/absence data, related to school completion):  
<https://transitionta.org/core-data-tools-for-dropout-prevention/>

REL West's work in Utah: *Developing Utah Solutions to Increase Attendance and Improve Student Outcomes*: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/Events/Details/271>

"Skipping to Nowhere: Students share their views about missing school" is a 2012 report from America's Promise that is based on interviews with over 500 teenagers in 25 cities. It discusses the students' reasons for not attending, what they do when not in school and other related topics. Retrieved from  
<http://www.americaspromise.org/sites/default/files/d8/legacy/bodyfiles/Get%20Schooled%20Truancy%20Report.pdf>

## V. School climate and safety

### An introduction to school climate and its impact on school completion

School climate is a multidimensional construct encompassing physical, social and academic factors. It plays a significant role in setting a suitable stage for learning to take place. According to the [National School Climate Center](#), the term school climate refers to "the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures."

Having a positive school climate is one of several protective factors that can have a beneficial impact on students' persisting and succeeding in school. Student outcomes affected by climate include attendance, assessment scores, and dropout and graduation rates (Ma & Klinger, 2000). School climate also affects teachers and school: several studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between a positive school climate and faculty and staff's morale and job satisfaction (Taylor & Tashakkori, 1997; Collie, Shapuka, & Perry, 2012).

## **The core components of school climate**

There are four main dimensions to school climate: school safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and institutional environment. Taken together, they shape a school culture which is expressed and perceived by the school community as “school climate.” This can be a positive or negative entity.

### ***Safety***

There has been much attention directed to school safety—largely focused on preventing bullying and other violence within schools. A toolkit from the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments entitled [\*Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment in Our Nation’s Classrooms\*](#) provides information on creating safe learning environments in which bullying is minimized.

While safety in the classroom is incredibly important, safety extends beyond preventing bullying *in* school. Safety also encompasses getting students from home to their school without physical or psychological harm and then protecting them from violence once they are in school. Safety on school busses is addressed in a toolkit from the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments entitled [\*Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment on Our Nation’s School Busses\*](#). Safety within the school can be improved by creating a school culture that fosters tolerance of differences and values kindness. It is supported by having a clear set of school rules that are understood by everyone in the school and enforced in a consistent and equitable manner.

### ***Relationships***

Another key piece of school climate is the assortment of relationships among the people in schools. The relationships students have with faculty and staff are a powerful factor in the way students perceive school. The most effective schools support a culture that values respect and kindness. Having even a single caring adult with whom he or she can share questions, problems, fears, and accomplishments can be the single factor that keeps some students from dropping out of school. Hence the success of some programs that pair struggling and at-risk students with a mentor or “monitor.”

In addition to students’ relationships with faculty and staff, the relationships students have with their peers helps shape school climate. The degree of care and respect that students show one another impacts their interactions in the classroom and can, consequently, alter the learning environment for better or worse.

Additionally, the relationships among the faculty, staff and school administration impact teachers’ perception of the school as well as their job satisfaction. Several studies have looked at teachers’ job satisfaction as it related to school climate—specifically the relationship between administration and faculty—and found them to be positively correlated. In schools where the administration supported the faculty and reduced obstacles to teaching, faculty job satisfaction was higher than in schools with more restrictive administrations.

### ***Teaching and learning***

Teaching and learning are a third piece of school climate. Implementing high quality curricula that are relevant to students' interests and needs supports student learning. Evidence-based instructional strategies and teaching practices, such as differentiated instruction, scaffolded learning, active listening, note taking, and providing constructive feedback are effective means of supporting learning. Students, especially students with disabilities or English language learners, often struggle with math and reading. Providing additional group and individualized instruction in these areas for struggling learners can make the difference between their success or failure. If a supportive learning environment is in place and the teachers and students are engaged, the students will learn more effectively than if those conditions are absent.

The fourth facet of school climate involves institutional environment, which encompasses engagement in a general sense and the physical environment of the school building and grounds. As previously discussed, school engagement is multidimensional. When we refer to engagement in the context of school climate, we refer to a sense of belonging to the school community and active (and willing) participation in that community on the part of the students, the staff and the families.

Improving institutional environment doesn't have to be expensive or hard to accomplish. It can begin as simply as keeping the buildings and grounds clean and neat. A coat of paint, some student artwork, a courtyard garden, or even a receptionist (the first face someone sees when walking into a school) who smiles and is kind can all improve the "feeling" of the school.

### **Indicators of school climate and safety**

According to [\*Measuring School Climate Using the 2015 School Crime Supplement Technical Report\*](#) (Lessne, Yanez & Sinclair, 2018), there is no single agreed-upon set of domains that comprise school climate. Likewise there is not a single perfect measure of school climate. There exist, however, many measures of school climate, some commercially available and some freely available. These generally consist of surveys that are administered to some combination or permutation of the students, faculty and staff, and parents. The survey items usually touch on matters of respondents' perceptions of safety, environment, atmosphere, respect, etc. Some examples of school climate measures are listed below. As is the case with any data-collection instrument, the value in school climate measures lies in analyzing, understanding and acting on the findings after the surveys are administered!

### **School-based improvement strategies to support a positive school climate**

Survey your students, staff and parents to learn how they perceive the school's climate. Use what you learn to address concerns or needs.

Examine your school's data at the system levels, noting any trends or patterns, then use that information to tailor universal and targeted interventions to the school's needs.

Examine student-level data via an early warning system or other means to identify students who might benefit from a mentor.

Ask students for their opinions on matters that affect them. As is reasonably possible, offer choices based on what you learn from them. In the classroom, for example, provide some flexibility, letting students choose between demonstrating their knowledge of a topic by a doing a project, writing a paper or by another means.

Make school and learning relevant to students by connecting academic studies with practical applications that are of interest to your students. CTE classes are one good means of making this connection.

Offer diverse extracurricular activities that interest your students and encourage them to participate. Again, ask students what sorts of extracurricular activities they would like to have available.

### **Selected measures of school climate:**

The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments maintains a list of valid and reliable school climate measures at <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/school-climate-measurement/school-climate-survey-compendium>. Additionally, they host a [summary table of school climate surveys](#).

The School Climate Survey: a set of multi-dimensional surveys to measure student perceptions of school climate among students in grades 3-12.

<https://www.pbisapps.org/About-Us/Pages/Announcing-the-School-Climate-Survey.aspx>

*IES Indicators of School Crime and Safety*: the site houses the latest school and crime safety report as well as links to other information and resources on school climate.

<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/crimeindicators/>

California school climate, health and learning system: <http://cal-schls.wested.org/>

Wisconsin school climate survey:

<https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/tsclimatesurveyinstructions.pdf>

### **Additional resources to support a positive school climate**

*Quick Guide on Making School Climate Improvements*:

<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/scirp/quick-guide>

*Center for Social and Emotional Education School Climate Brief Vol. 1 No. 1*:

<https://schoolclimate.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/sc-brief-dropout-prevention.pdf>

List of directories of programmatic interventions at:

<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/program-implementation>

[https://www.naesp.org/resources/2/Leadership\\_Compass/2007/LC2007v5n1a4.pdf](https://www.naesp.org/resources/2/Leadership_Compass/2007/LC2007v5n1a4.pdf)

How middle school climate and academic performance are related across schools and over time. 2017 REL publication:

<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=4523>

## **VI. Family engagement**

### **What Family Engagement is and why it is important**

Parents and families are their children’s earliest and often their most influential educators, with many opportunities to build the foundation for a lifetime of learning. Families educate their children every day—both in formal and informal ways. Through positive interactions with their children, parents promote healthy development of school readiness, academic achievement, high self-esteem, motivation, successful relationships, and critical work habits. As children enter and progress through school, both research and conventional wisdom support that one of the most effective means of ensuring academic success is to engage families in their children’s education.

Effective family engagement in school centers around what families do at home and in the community to support their children’s learning and development and what schools do to reach out to engage parents in meaningful ways to promote shared partnerships that improve outcomes for students. All too often, family engagement is characterized by school personnel as parents’ attendance and participation in school activities. While participation in-school activities (volunteering, attending events, serving on committees) are important; family engagement means much more than attendance at, and participation in, school activities. Rather, family engagement refers to the conscious effort on the part of parents and others to engage in a child’s education and development by promoting positive behaviors and ensuring well-being. In fact, a meta-analysis of research on family engagement found the strongest associations between type of parental involvement and academic achievement were found when parents have high academic expectations for their children, develop and maintain communication with them about school activities and schoolwork, and promote the development of reading habits (Castro, Expósito-Casas, López-Martín, Lizasoain, Navarro-Asencio, & Gaviria, 2015).

### **Two YouTube videos on family engagement**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5W7BpT02Tw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gleiLw4Ae2w>

### **Family Engagement and Transition-aged youth with disabilities**

While family engagement confers benefits on all students, those with disabilities often require a greater degree of parental involvement and advocacy than their peers without disabilities in



order to be assured of receiving the same level of instruction as the general student population (Ferrel, 2012). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) law requires that parents and families be involved in the creation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), which help to determine appropriate settings and services for their children. Beyond this legal mandate, IDEA also acknowledges the unique importance of home–school partnerships for students with disabilities throughout their time in school. Families are essential to the transition process for any youth and assumes roles as advocates; informants in assessments, collaborators, encouragers, monitors, models, decision makers and partners in student learning (Wandry & Pleet, 2009; 2010). For youth with disabilities in transition, parents and families are often the most helpful historians, providing the transition team partners with an essential level of detail about the background, experiences, and functional needs of their young person. Until the youth with disabilities learns how to take the lead, families are the experts on their youth with disabilities. Their active involvement can make the difference between success and failure.

### **The impact of family engagement on school completion**

In the area of school completion, engaging parents in their children’s and adolescents’ school life is a promising protective factor. Research shows that parent engagement in schools promotes a range of benefits that help students to be more successful in school including improved school readiness, higher student achievement, better social skills and behavior, and increased likelihood of high school graduation (Cavanagh, 2012; Epstein, 2001; Mapp & Kuttner, 2014; Sheldon, 2002; Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Conversely, family disengagement is one of the multiple risk factors of dropout—a lack of communication between families and the school and—the family feeling “unwelcomed” are triggers that predict future dropout. With respect to school engagement, several studies have shown that parental aspirations, goals, and values are related to their children’s setting of academic goals, persistence in school, course enrollment, intellectual accomplishments, and attendance of college (Fan, Williams, & Wolters, 2012). In addition, studies have documented that parents’ values towards education are significantly and positively correlated to their children’s educational attainment, persistence, and performance (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Given its impact on staying in school, progressing in school, and graduating from school, family engagement is increasingly recognized as a critical component of school completion efforts and good school reform practices.

### **Barriers to effective family engagement**

Today’s family structure is less homogenous and monochromatic than ever before. They are often a blend of cultures, ethnicities, and races. There are more single parent households and the number of same sex parents is also increasing. Typical parental role shifts have occurred resulting in more stay at home dads, as well as children in foster care. These changing dynamics will require different tactics, especially when it comes to understanding the family

dynamic, communicating about the type of support that is doable for parental engagement, and creating a welcoming school environment.

Even though many educators and parents are aware of the value of family engagement, home school partnerships are hampered by several hurdles and challenges. These include parents' previous negative experiences or interactions with schools and limited professional development and training of educators in family and community engagement. Both educators and parents may lack training in how best to engage families with disabilities. In some communities, particularly with families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and differing cultural contexts, achieving a level of family and community engagement that supports student success is a challenge. If your school is experiencing this challenge, these useful tools and resources to help your team get started.

<https://flamboyantfoundation.org/resource/connecting-with-hard-to-reach-families/> and The Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education [https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/pacific/pdf/REL\\_2016148.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/pacific/pdf/REL_2016148.pdf).

### **The core components of family engagement**

No single approach to family engagement exists. It is interwoven with environmental factors surrounding the child and is highly context- and resource-dependent. A number of agencies and organizations have developed standards and frameworks to assist state and local education agencies to build capacity in family engagement. Some of these efforts include: The Dual Capacity Building Framework For Family-School Partnerships <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf>; The Guideposts for Success: A Framework for Families Preparing Youth for Adulthood [http://www.ncwd-youth.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/infobrief\\_36.pdf](http://www.ncwd-youth.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/infobrief_36.pdf); PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships [www.pta.org/nationalstandards](http://www.pta.org/nationalstandards).

These frameworks share some common themes, family engagement must: provide mechanisms for effective positive communication; promote inclusiveness for the concern and success of every student and their family; be linked to student learning and success, build trusting and cooperative relationships between parents and schools; require shared decision making, and promote collaboration within the community. These frameworks also emphasize that to be effective family engagement efforts must be systemic: purposefully designed and valued as core components of educational goals such as school readiness, student achievement, and school turnaround; integrated: embedded into routine structures and processes for school improvement, professional development, teaching and learning, curriculum and community; and sustained: efforts operate with adequate resources and infrastructure (Weiss, Lopez, and Rosenberg, 2011).

## **What parents can do to promote family engagement**

### ***Communicate***

Provide the school with the best times and methods to communicate with you. Find out the best method for communicating with school staff, some individuals will prefer phone calls, others will respond best to e-mail or written notes. Update your contact information whenever there is a change. Respond as quickly and completely as possible to school contacts. Check in with your child daily for notes, newsletters, or other communications from the school. Find out how to access the school and school district websites, and check regularly for current information.

### ***Connect***

Talk with your son or daughter's teacher to find out how you can reinforce at home what your child is learning at school. Listen to your child's dreams for the future, and provide all the supports you can to make those come true. Engage your own networks for experience opportunities, job leads and other supports. Get to know your school community- reach out to your child's teachers early and express your interest in developing a partnership, introduce yourself to the principal and other school staff.

### ***Engage***

Seek out and ask for resources to help you actively participate in your child's IEP and transition planning meeting and how to support your child to plan for the future. Help professionals learn about youth's strengths and needs. Learn about what questions to ask when looking at postsecondary agencies and services. Ask questions, be part of discussions, assist in exploring interests related to living and work. Help develop your child's postsecondary goals. Advocate for improvements in the school building and with local school boards and state and federal government to ensure schools have the resources they need to provide a world class education to every student.

### ***Promote attendance***

Ensure that your child gets to school every day and is on time. Keep the school informed about home matters that impact your child's attendance. Talk with your child's teachers about class attendance for each class. Monitor tardiness and per period cuts. Remember all absences matter because they are time away from instruction. Promoting good attendance habits now will promote good attendance in future jobs and college.

### ***Promote good pro-social behaviors***

Understand how your child interacts with peers, teachers and others at school. Watch for signs that your child is being bullied and take appropriate action with teachers and school

administrators. Share your concerns and thoughts about your child’s behavior (positive and negative) with the school. Let the school know if there are issues at home that might affect your child’s behavior at school. Review school rules and expectation with your child, discussing rewards and consequences for their behavior. Promote good problem solving skill. If your son or daughter is experiencing multiple office and disciplinary referrals, ask for a functional behavior analysis from the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) team to begin to positively address the behavior of concern. Remember, your positive engagement will result in better social behaviors from your child.

***Promote academic learning and better grades***

Establish and communicate high expectations and aspirations for your child. Be an active partner in your child’s education—Attend parent-teacher meetings if possible, participate in IEP meetings, talk with your child about his or her goals and work with the school to help with those goals. Know and understand the graduation requirements for your child. Ask about the number of credits required for graduation. Access and use your child’s academic scores to ensure they’re on track. Frequently view the parent portal (or whichever tool your school uses) to stay up to date on critical assignments and major school activities. If there are multiple pathways to graduation, talk with the school about which is best for your child now and in the future. Review your child’s report card, progress reports and progress on IEP goals. Is your child on track to graduate on time? Talk with the school about questions or concerns.

**Some systemic district and school practices that promote family engagement**

- Develop and implement a district-level improvement plan in partnership with stakeholders, including family and community members to develop a sustainable program of family engagement.
- Develop a customer service plan with guidelines to be used by all school staff regarding the welcoming of visitors into the school.
- Use a professional development day to address assumptions about race, class, and culture.
- Convey a clear message that family participation is wanted and valued. It is particularly important to reach out to parents who have low rates of participation in school activities.
- Ensure opportunities for families to develop personal relationships with teachers and other school staff, including the principal. Engage parents with school boards and committees. Hold informal school functions, such as potluck dinners and other relaxed settings in which teachers can develop relationships with parents. Be accessible and

available. It's one thing to say families are welcome and valued, but another thing to show it.

- Provide parents with access to relevant educational information, including data about the school and their child. Translate educational documents into parents' home languages;
- Provide a program of professional development for teachers about effective family engagement strategies, such as engaging and communicating with English language learner (ELL) families, culturally responsive training and relationship-building.
- Actively recruit and engage parents in developing and supporting district and school wide policies and improvement plans such as the Student Success / School Improvement, parent advisory committees, Title I, Bilingual Education, attendance workgroups, PTO.

### **Some school-based improvement strategies that promote family engagement**

- Create a welcoming environment so all families walking into the school building feel that it is a place where they “belong.” Entering a friendly, vibrant atmosphere lets families know that the school is “an integral part of the community” and that they are valued members of that community. This is especially important for immigrant, culturally, and racially diverse families who may be entering into the school for the first time.
- Create bulletin boards at the front of the school with positive information about students' accomplishments and activities.
- Post school information in multiple languages.
- Create environments that are visibly representative of the school population—not just the majority culture—on the walls, through student work and photos, in the classroom, with books and lessons that incorporate their experiences and traditions, in school-wide cultural activities, in the faces of staff and volunteers who come from similar backgrounds. All students and their families should be able to see themselves represented throughout the school.
- Engage parents by inviting them to sit in or volunteer in classes. Set up a parent help desk or visitor welcome center outside the school office. Explore the need for and feasibility of establishing a family resource center in the school. Conduct meet-and-greet walks in the neighborhoods where students live.
- Communicate effectively and share information with parents and listen to what they have to say. Develop a system of ongoing communication and interaction (e.g., e-mail, notes home, home visits, regularly scheduled meetings in addition to IEP meetings).

Many ways that schools give out information, such as handouts, newsletters, handbooks, automatic phone messages, and websites, do not provide an easy and routine way for families to respond. Be creative in making use of all channels of communication, including cable television, newspapers, radio, automated phone systems, text messaging, school and PTA websites, etc. Provide fairs, brochures, or workshops to educate parents about adult services and post school supports in the community (e.g., vocational rehabilitation, mental health resources, postsecondary education institutions and supports).

- Identify parents, community members, local organizations, and businesses that can help strengthen homeschool communication. Make sure all information is communicated in languages and formats to reach all parents. Establish a process for two-way communication between teachers and parents—parents should be encouraged to contact teachers with questions, concerns, and recommendations regarding their children’s learning. Map the school’s parent-teacher contacts: how often do teachers communicate with families; what are the main topics; and when do they have face-to-face contact? Work with the PTA/parent group to establish guidelines for regular communication between home and school (e.g., monthly calls from teachers to parents, home visits, weekly newsletters).
- Provide relevant information about transition planning to parents through a variety of means (e.g., written, face-to-face, community-based trainings such as Autism Society) at each stage of the transition planning process such as transition from middle to high school, age of majority, graduation. Provide multiple options for involvement (e.g., pre-IEP planning input, flexible IEP meeting times) and alternate ways to obtain input in the transition planning process.
- Engage parents in their children’s learning through social networks. In addition to traditional methods (e.g., phone calls, text messages, newsletters, face-to-face meetings), schools are communicating and engaging with families thru email listservs, Twitter, Facebook, a parent-school Wiki, virtual chat, blog, and a Google text line. Technology has afforded these new options but the schools using these methods will need to ensure that parent engagement is not hampered due to out of school equity issues for youth and families without access to these options. When schools use these options, they will need to augment them with more accessible traditional methods. Collaborate with families to identify how the school and family/guardian can best access these social networks and routinely evaluate their effectiveness to reach all families.
- Empower parents with leadership roles in the school environment. Build relationships through activities such as helping parents and caregivers develop their own skills. Offer educational activities for families and students together that connect families with

schools and resources in the community. Offer parents core team membership in school completion efforts and initiatives. Engage parents in school and district level planning for postsecondary education, employment, and community participation. Conduct a survey of parents to identify volunteer interests, talents and availability, matching these resources to school programs and staff-support needs.

- Provide parents with classes to help with their own education or their child's education. It should not be assumed that parents have the information and skills needed to help their children succeed in school. Ask the PTA to communicate with the school administration about the benefits of parent engagement in school health activities and possible actions that can be taken. Provide training and assistance for parents in reinforcing classroom instruction and providing behavioral support for their children at home. Consider the establishment of a parent academy or other structured programs to teach parents effective engagement and advocacy strategies.
- Provide families with opportunities to engage with their children's education at home and at school. Schools should provide parents with materials that explain school rules and expectations and adapt materials for families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It is also important for teachers to share information about what students are learning in school and recommend specific ways that parents can support that learning at home. Provide training and materials for parents on how to improve children's study skills or learning in various academic subjects. Provide a directory of community resources and activities that link to student learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students. Offer workshops to inform families of the high expectations and standards children are expected to meet in each grade level. Share transition assessment results with parents so that parents can use the information to provide training for their child in the home and the community and identify natural supports. See Ohio's Statewide efforts to support schools:

<http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Other-Resources/Family-and-Community-Engagement/Getting-Parents-Involved/Sample-Best-Practices-for-Parent-Involvement-in-School>

Below is a suggested process Georgia schools follow to ensure an effective school-parent compact is linked to learning [http://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/Federal-Programs/Partnerships/Documents/FY19\\_Compact\\_LinkedToLearning.pdf](http://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/Federal-Programs/Partnerships/Documents/FY19_Compact_LinkedToLearning.pdf)

- Reach out to families and the community. Community schools provide family engagement programming by offering comprehensive services such as health screening, parenting education, job training and English classes at the school site. Work with PTA, parent leaders, and community members to organize health fairs, college prep fairs, and

other events that provide active participation of students and families, school staff, and community members. The brochure by Center for Disease Control provides good information about health issues:

[https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/parent\\_engagement\\_strategies.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/parent_engagement_strategies.pdf)

- Provide opportunities for students, school staff, and families to serve their community (recycling, art, music, drama, environmental projects, etc.) Publicize successful changes in a school program as result of family and community engagement. Publicize in a variety of ways such as marquees, newsletters, Web sites, e-mail, texts, calls, and at events.
- Invite community business members—especially those who are parents—to share information about careers and to serve on school committees. Incorporate community service projects into the curriculum and instruction.
- Work with the community to provide a resource directory and one-stop shopping for family services through partnerships of school, counseling, health, recreation, job training, adult education, and other service agencies.

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Family Engagement and Children with Disabilities: A Resource Guide for Educators and Parents Harvard (Ferrel, 2012)

<http://www.njcite.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Family-Engagement-+-Children-w-Disabilities-Harvard-9-20121.pdf>

Engaging Families in Education (Weyer, 2015)

[http://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/educ/Engaging\\_Families\\_Education.pdf](http://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/educ/Engaging_Families_Education.pdf)

*A New Wave of Evidence SEDL (2002) – Advancing Research, Improving Education the Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement:*

<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED536946.pdf>

*Link It to Learning: Concrete Tips for Making Family Engagement Happen:*

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/14/10/link-it-learning>



*Partners Education in A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family–School Partnerships:*  
<http://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf>

New Mexico’s *Working Together: School, Family, and Community Partnerships* (toolkit):  
<http://nmengaged.com/resources-toolkit/>

GA System of Continuous Improvement Parent Engagement Partnerships- Content and featured videos <http://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/Federal-Programs/Partnerships/Pages/Parent-Engagement-Program.aspx>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVol4HLivng>

Effective school-parent compact is linked to learning

[http://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/Federal-Programs/Partnerships/Documents/FY19\\_Compact\\_LinkedToLearning.pdf](http://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/Federal-Programs/Partnerships/Documents/FY19_Compact_LinkedToLearning.pdf)

Breiseth, L. “A Guide for Engaging ELL Families: Twenty Strategies for School Leaders.” *Colorín Colorado*, August 2011. p. 9. <https://www.colorincolorado.org/guide/guide-engaging-ell-families-twenty-strategies-school-leaders>

Global Family Research Project: <https://globalfrp.org/>

Ohio’s sample strategies to increase parent involvement:

<http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Other-Resources/Family-and-Community-Engagement/Getting-Parents-Involved/Sample-Best-Practices-for-Parent-Involvement-in-Sc>

The Dual Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships: [www.ed.gov/family-and-community-engagement](http://www.ed.gov/family-and-community-engagement)

A Guide for Engaging ELL Families: Twenty Strategies for School Leaders Written for Colorín Colorado by Lydia Breiseth Manager, Colorín Colorado with Kristina Robertson and Susan Lafond August, 2011.

<https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/cms/lib07/MA01906464/Centricity/Domain/112/Engaging-ELL-Families.pdf>

PTA’s National Standards for Family-School Partnerships: <https://www.pta.org/home/run-your-pta/National-Standards-for-Family-School-Partnerships>

### **Tools and Resources for families**

Pennsylvania’s Helping Students Succeed and Graduate from High School:

<https://www.pattan.net/publications/caps-helping-students-succeed-and-graduate-from-hi/>

Ohio's sample strategies to increase parent involvement:

<http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Other-Resources/Family-and-Community-Engagement/Getting-Parents-Involved/Sample-Best-Practices-for-Parent-Involvement-in-School>

*I HAVE A QUESTION... What Parents and Caregivers Can Ask and Do to Help Children Thrive at School* A PARENT CHECKLIST: <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/parent-checklist.pdf>

How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Improve Student Achievement and Influence School Reform: <http://nmengaged.com/resources-toolkit/>

The Guideposts for Success: A Framework for Families Preparing Youth for Adulthood: <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/publications/guideposts-for-success-families/>

What questions should I ask as my child transitions from middle to high school? <https://www.pta.org/home/family-resources/Special-Education-Toolkit/Special-Education-From-Pre-K-to-Graduation-and-Beyond#>

The Appleseed Project's 150 Days of Family Engagement Activities: <http://www.projectappleseed.org/activities>

*Report on the Positive Relationship between Family Involvement and Student Success*

IES 2012 Parent Involvement study: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013028rev.pdf>

[https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/The\\_Impact\\_of\\_Family\\_Involvement\\_FR.pdf](https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/The_Impact_of_Family_Involvement_FR.pdf)

How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Improve Student Achievement and Influence School Reform by Lacy Wood & Emily Bauman (2017):

<https://www.nmefoundation.org/publications/how-family-school-and-community-engagement-can-improve-student-achievement-and-influence-school-reform/>

[https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/parent\\_engagement\\_strategies.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/parent_engagement_strategies.pdf)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2012.

The Appleseed Project's 150 Days of Family Engagement Activities: <http://www.projectappleseed.org/activities>

### **Strategies for families**

*Pennsylvania's Helping Students Succeed and Graduate from High School*

Ohio's sample strategies to increase parent involvement:

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### **Tools and resources for schools**

*A New Wave of Evidence SEDL – Advancing Research, Improving Education the Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement:*

<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED536946.pdf>

*Link It to Learning: Concrete Tips for Making Family Engagement Happen:*

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/14/10/link-it-learning>

*Partners Education in A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family–School Partnerships:*

<http://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf>

*New Mexico's Working Together: School, Family, and Community Partnerships (toolkit):*

<http://nmengaged.com/resources-toolkit/>

**Global Family Research Project:** <https://globalfrp.org/>

### **Tools and Resources for families**

<http://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/faqs.pdf>

*I HAVE A QUESTION...What Parents and Caregivers Can Ask and Do to Help Children Thrive at School A PARENT CHECKLIST:*

<https://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/parent-checklist.pdf>

*America's Promise Parent Engagement Toolkit:* <http://www.americaspromise.org/parent-engagement-toolkit>

*Free to Fail or On-Track to College:* <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/free-fail-or-track-college>

## **VII. Reentry and reengagement**

### **An introduction to reentry and reengagement**

Dropout is costly in numerous ways to the individuals who drop out, their families, their communities, and finally, to society as a whole. This is particularly true for students with disabilities, who tend to drop out at a higher rate than their nondisabled peers, and whose outcomes suffer without the services and supports made available to them in school. Compared to high school graduates, dropouts are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed; dependent on community, state and federal services due to health and economic needs; and are more often incarcerated or otherwise involved in the criminal justice system. These issues are magnified among youth with disabilities who have dropped out. Consequently, keeping students with disabilities in school and providing supports to help them

graduate with useful and meaningful skills is a major concern at all levels. Identifying and reengaging youth with disabilities who have dropped out is another significant challenge, but one with many potential benefits.

### **The core components of reentry and reengagement**

The first step in reengaging out-of-school youth involves finding and connecting with them. The school's records may not be current—particularly if a student just stopped attending school, rather than going through a formal withdrawal process. If the community is small enough, finding the family and the student may be a simple matter—particularly if he or she has siblings who are still attending school. In larger communities, finding individual out-of-school youth can pose a greater challenge.

Once the student has been located, getting him or her reengaged and willing to return to school is the next challenge. We cannot simply expect that a student will be eager to return to the exact same school setting and situation he or she abandoned. Reentry programs need to be flexible and should make it as 'painless' as possible to return to an academic setting. Most dropouts tend to be credit deficient, so there needs to be a provision to earn missing academic credits via credit recovery programs or other means. In many cases, students are severely credit deficient, so this can be daunting for the student. Reentry programs also need to address other barriers to students' attending, such as child care, transportation, flexible hours to accommodate work schedules, etc.

In addition to providing academic instruction, it is beneficial to provide reentering youth with coaching and support for both academics and other needs. Providing self-determination training and teaching problem-solving and coping skills can be beneficial for these youth. Additionally, implementing a mentoring program that keeps track of the student's progress and provides them with a caring adult with whom they can discuss school and personal matters can increase the likelihood of success for returning students. Even with such extra supports and interventions, youth with disabilities who return to school after dropping out frequently still struggle and many do not ever graduate.

### **School-based strategies to support reengagement**

- Talk with returning students to learn what they will need in order to re-engage in school and succeed. Find out why they left school in the first place and work with them to address whatever barriers exist to their success in school. Their needs may include transportation, flexible schedules, child care, health care, mental health, counseling, nutrition, or employment.
- Fund district-based programs that focus on re-engaging dropouts via a non-standard school setting. Try not to put returning students back into the environment in which they failed the first time.
- Provide credit-recovery options for re-engaging students. Most youth who drop out of school are credit deficient and many are in need of literacy support. If a student hopes to receive a regular diploma, it is essential to ensure he or she is literate and has a

realistic chance of accruing number of academic credits required by the state or district to graduate.

- Ensure that students are academically proficient when they leave the program by presenting rigorous academic content in a real-world context to engage students and increase the relevance of the school experience.
- Develop dual-enrollment programs with local technical and community colleges in the area.
- Connect returning students with career awareness activities and any student supports that might be beneficial to him or her.
- Provide caring adult coaches/mentors to address re-entering students' needs and problems as they reenter the educational environment.
- Provide opportunities to gain paid or unpaid work experience via supported employment, internships, service learning, or other means. Connect with your local chamber of commerce and other local business councils to secure workplace learning opportunities for reentering (and all) youth.

### **Tools and Resources to support reentry and re-engagement**

***Gateway to College:*** Programs to help disconnected youth get a high school diploma and attend college <http://www.gatewaytocollege.org/>

***Re-engaging High School Dropouts as a Growth Strategy for PA.***

[https://www.papartnerships.org/reports/re-engaging/re-engaging\\_hs\\_dropouts.pdf](https://www.papartnerships.org/reports/re-engaging/re-engaging_hs_dropouts.pdf)

***Characteristics and education outcomes of Utah high school dropouts who re-enrolled*** (Barrat and Berliner, 2016)

[https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/pdf/REL\\_2017206.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/pdf/REL_2017206.pdf)

***Online credit recovery: Enrollment and passing patterns in Montana Digital Academy courses*** (Stevens and Frazelle, 2016)

<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=431>

***2008 Guide for Practice... Engaging and Re-engaging Students in Learning at School:***

<http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engagingandre-engagingstudents.pdf>

### **Section 3: A Process to Improve School Completion Rates**

As recommended in the IES Practice Guide to Dropout Prevention (Cobb, et al: 2008), to improve graduation and dropout rates, we must first be aware of the strengths and needs of our school community. This can be done at the state level and flowed down to the districts and then the schools, or it can be accomplished at the district or even lone school level. Whatever the starting point, a good place to begin is by looking at data about the state, district or school to identify broad trends and patterns in areas such as attendance, achievement, behavior, and student engagement. By examining and understanding such system-wide data, we can begin to identify and prioritize broad areas of need. At the state level, this knowledge can be used to inform policy or guide the development of a statewide initiative. At the more local levels, it can

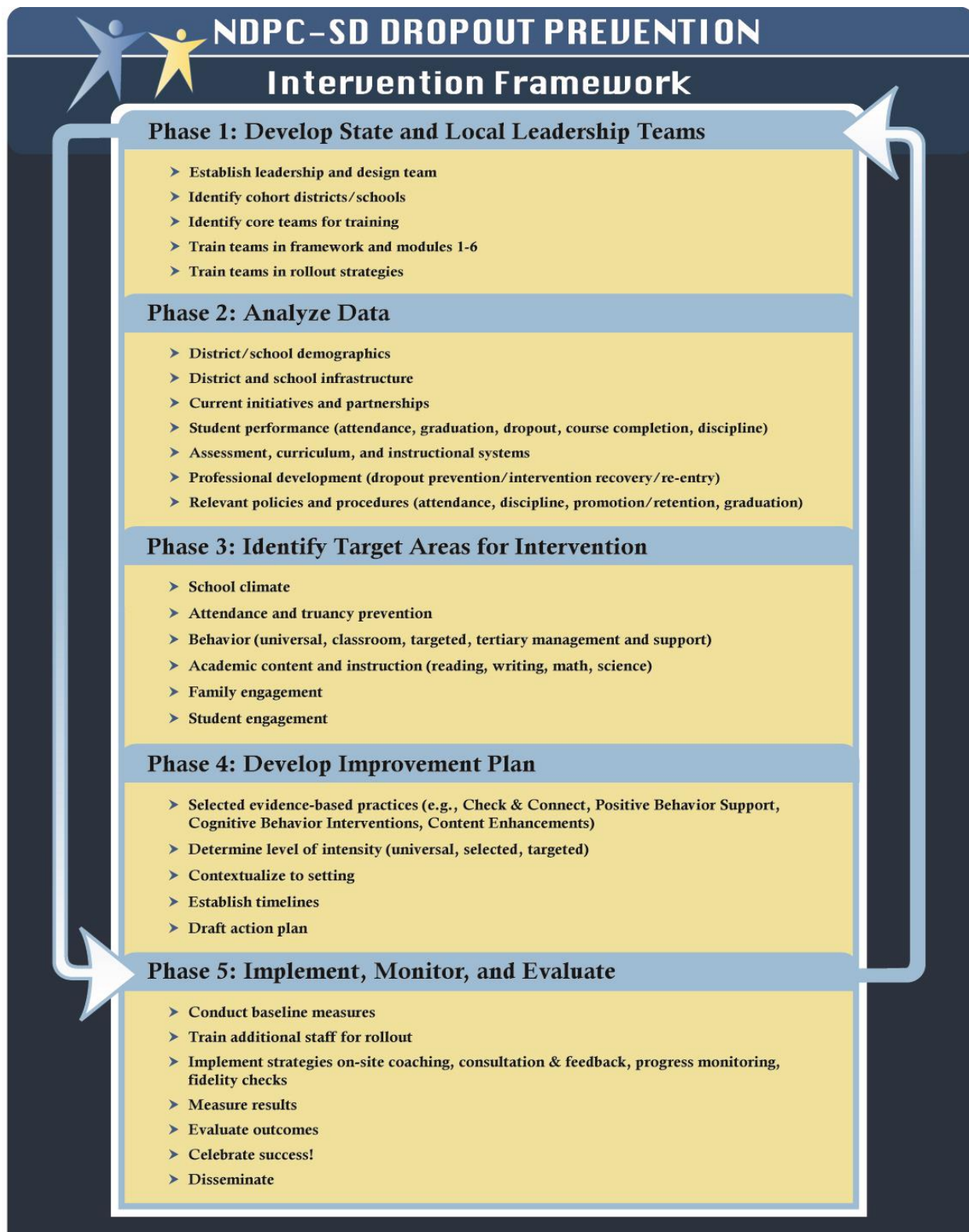
be used to support the development of a focused school-completion initiative that is tailored to the specific needs of the district or school. While this section is concerned primarily with developing a local initiative,

The *Dropout Prevention Intervention Framework* (AKA the Framework) developed by the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD) is a five-phase, systematic process that incorporates knowledge transfer and utilization of dropout-prevention research, proven practices that work, policies and procedures that support school completion, and the implementation of evidence-based practices within a contextual fit to support the development of a local school-completion initiative. It outlines a sequence of steps that a school district or school can follow to develop a local intervention plan and then implement and evaluate that plan, emphasizing problem solving and the selection of appropriate evidence-based interventions as informed by a structured analysis of local data. This tool frames the need for systemic change in a local context and underscores the need to employ data-based decision making to decrease dropout and improve school completion rates for students with disabilities. The Framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

### **Phase 1: Developing State and Local Leadership Teams**

From a State perspective, the first step in beginning a school completion initiative is to identify and enlist the help of the right people to support and do the work. The core State leadership team does not have to be large, but it must include people who can get things done at their level to establish and sustain the initiative. Additional people will be needed at each level to conceive, develop, implement, and sustain the initiative, but having a strong leadership team is a must.

At the State level, it is critical to enlist the support of one or more people who have budget authority and who can allocate the staff and fiscal resources needed to make the initiative possible. The absence of such support can limit the scope, depth and sustainability of the effort. Having this support can enrich the effort and broaden its scope to include the support and participation of relevant state and regional agencies and personnel. It is also wise to include



**Figure 1**

***The Dropout Prevention Intervention Framework***

staff from both special education and general education. All students can benefit from an initiative of this nature, so it behooves both staffs to be aware of and actively involved in the initiative. Having access to valid and reliable data is essential to data-based decision making—a central tenant of this work—so a state-level data administrator should be included on the State team. If the State has a technical assistance division or branch, it can be beneficial to include a representative from this group, as they can help in delivering local training or in scaling up the initiative to a regional or local level.

At the local level, it is similarly critical to have a high-level administrator on board supporting and advocating for the initiative. This could be an assistant superintendent, principal, assistant principal, director of special education, or another person at this level. Other local staff who should be involved are special education and general education teachers, a data manager or other person with access to the local data, a school counselor and/or psychologist, the curriculum director, the attendance officer, and one or more parents and students. Having representation of the local business roundtable, local faith-based organizations, community organizations, and local law enforcement can also help garner community support for the initiative, though it is wise to balance the size of the team with broad representation. A smaller core team can draw on the expertise and support of others, as needed, during throughout the process of designing, developing, implementing, and scaling-up a local initiative.

## **Phase 2: Analyzing system- and student-level data**

Having the right information and understanding its meaning is an effective and efficient way to begin any undertaking. Likewise, it is an empowering way to approach the development of a school completion initiative. To conserve resources and make appropriate choices of strategies and interventions, it is critical to understand the strengths and needs of the educational environment you are setting out to improve before acting. It is also critical to understand the infrastructure and resources available to support existing and new initiatives as well as the regulations, policies and procedures in place in the environment.

The data analysis for planning a school completion initiative need not be a complicated undertaking. It can be as simple as graphing multiple years of system-level data about a few broad, key indicators, such as graduation, dropout, attendance, discipline, and academic pass/failure rates, and looking for trends and patterns in the data. When an indicator's data appears to be trending the wrong direction or there are random fluctuations in the data, that's where to begin digging deeper into one or more of these areas to learn about the magnitude and severity of the problem (if there is a real problem, rather than a change or an error in the measurement of whatever is being examined), the group or groups involved, how long the problem has been going on, etc.

Other system-level data to consider when analyzing the root cause of problems include school climate information, student and family engagement data, as well as policies and procedures in place that might impact school completion. Examine the data through the lens of factors that might push or pull students out of school.



There are numerous data tools that can help with the data analysis. Spreadsheet programs, such as Excel or Quattro Pro, are inexpensive yet powerful tools that can sort data, perform many analyses and generate graphs and charts that can be shared with the team as well as the other stakeholders. Purpose-specific analysis tools, such as the Dropout Data Tools, a set of Excel-based spreadsheets that are available on the NTACTION website ([www.transitionta.org/XXX](http://www.transitionta.org/XXX)), provide ready-made templates to conduct the first, broad examination of a district or school's data, as well as templates to facilitate a deeper dig into data about graduation and dropout rates, attendance, behavior/discipline, and academics (specifically, English and mathematics).

At the local level, in addition to understanding system-wide needs, it is critical to understand the strengths and needs of the individual students. Whether using a formalized early warning and intervention system, such as NTACTION's Risk Calculator, or another data review process that examines data about individual students to help place them in appropriate classes and interventions, and ensure that they receive the supports they need to be successful in school and afterward. This step is particularly helpful when implementing a multi-tiered system of support, as it supports the placement of students in the appropriate intervention groups to match their needs.

### **Phase 3: Identifying target areas for intervention**

With extremely good luck, only one major factor will emerge as being responsible for low graduation or high dropout rates! If, however, analysis reveals multiple needs—the more common scenario—the best course of action is to determine their priority and the ease with which each can be addressed. As a team works through the process of prioritizing the issues, they should consider their major goal(s) and what **must** be addressed most immediately (student and staff safety issues, for example). They should also consider the magnitude of each issue—that is, which students and how many students of them are affected by the issues—what efforts and costs will be required to mitigate each, and what current and projected resources might be needed.

It is also critical to consider the number and scope of all the initiatives currently being implemented in the district or school. This may uncover existing initiatives that might be extended or expanded to address those “new” needs uncovered through the data analysis. Being aware of the current initiatives can also prevent duplication of effort and, very importantly, avoid overloading staff with too many interventions. If staff resources are spread across too many interventions at a time, it is likely that none will be implemented with fidelity or effectiveness and that the morale and patience of the implementers will be severely taxed.

The areas of intervention need may be systemic—that is, related to school policies, procedures and regulations, or to school climate, school schedule, curriculum, or family outreach, support and engagement—or they may be at the student level. Factors that impact the entire student body should be addressed via universal interventions. Examples of universal interventions that can impact school completion include attendance programs and schoolwide behavioral programs, such as Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS). Targeted interventions

may be implemented to support groups of students sharing a common need. Examples of targeted interventions include academic supports focused on struggling readers in a particular grade and holding regular discussions with groups of students who need additional support to address attendance or behavioral issues. Students who have high-level needs may be supported via intensive interventions tailored to their specific needs. For example, students at high risk of dropout because of poor attendance may be assigned a mentor/monitor with whom they meet daily to check in and talk.

#### **Phase 4: Developing a local improvement plan**

After gaining an understanding of the dimensions of the problem and determining a major, measurable goal or two, it is time to consider and choose the best evidence-based or promising strategies and interventions to address the identified needs within the local context. The NDPC-SD Attribute Sheets can help with this process. Each sheet provides a definition of one potential focus area for intervention: Academic Engagement, Attendance, Behavior, Student Engagement, Family Engagement, School Climate, and School-Business Partnerships. The sheets also describe the core attributes of each focus area as well as some effective strategies to address needs in the area. The purpose of the Attribute Sheets is to help a school team identify a goal in the focus area, the strategy(ies) that will be used to address needs in that area, and the steps that will be involved in implementing the strategy in their school.

After a team completes the attribute sheet(s) for the focus area or areas that were indicated by the data analysis, they will have the basic backbone of their school intervention plan. The next steps are to plan the interventions and other activities, identify the outcomes expected from those interventions and identify appropriate measures that will indicate progress as the interventions are implemented. The planning process should include appropriate stakeholders to ensure that the work will address the problem in an effective, efficient and inclusive manner.

#### **Phase 5: Implementing, monitoring and evaluating your work**

The local intervention plan should identify roles, responsibilities and timelines for implementing the selected interventions. It should also include one or more people who are primarily responsible for ensuring that appropriate formative and summative evaluation are collected as the project progresses. It is critical to assess ongoing progress in order to be able to adjust the implementation of interventions in a timely way and to be able to keep stakeholders informed.

There are numerous texts and guides on project evaluation. One extensive reference is the NSTTAC/NTACT:C Evaluation Toolkit. An index page is located at <https://transitionta.org/evaluation-toolkit/>. The entire work is available for download at: [https://transitionta.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/toolkit\\_Evaluation.pdf](https://transitionta.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/toolkit_Evaluation.pdf).

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