Grad Nation

A Guidebook to Help Communities Tackle The Dropout Crisis

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AMERICA'S PROMISE ALLIANCE

Thank You for Joining Us!

An Open Letter to America

You already realize the enormity of the crisis we face. More than 1.2 million students drop out of America's high schools each year, and at least 15 million children overall are at risk of not reaching productive adulthood. This is more than a problem; it is a catastrophe. America's failure to educate tomorrow's leaders and workforce puts our entire economic and national security at risk.

It's time for a nationwide "call to arms" — because we simply cannot afford to let nearly one-third of our kids fail.

The America's Promise Alliance is dedicated to improving the lives of America's young people by providing them with what we call the "*Five Promises*" — caring adults, safe places, a healthy start, effective education, and opportunities to help others. In fact, we have set a five-year goal of delivering more of these fundamental supports to the 15 million young people who need them most. Our research, *Every Child, Every Promise*, lays the groundwork for turning potential failure into action and, ultimately, into individual, community, and national success.

Our work is laser focused on ending the high school dropout epidemic. Over the next few years, the America's Promise Alliance is spearheading more than 100 dropout prevention summits in all 50 states. These summits will spark action in communities across America to address their high school dropout crises.

Grad Nation is your road map to playing a key role in this critical effort. It arms you and your community with the latest research, best practices, and key tools for meeting your community's dropout challenge. The guide will help you develop community-specific plans for keeping students on track to graduate from high school and to prepare for college, the workforce, and active citizenship.

Thank you for stepping forward and becoming part of this critical nationwide initiative. Together, we can help all of America's children live up to their promise . . . and fulfill our promise to every child.

Alma J. Powell
Chair, America's Promise Alliance

Marguerite W. Kondracke
President and CEO, America's Promise Alliance

An Introduction to Grad Nation

Thirty years ago, the National Commission on Excellence in Education gave a dire warning:

> Our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world….The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments.

In that 1983 report, commissioners noted one of the bright spots. During the previous 30 years, schools had become major vehicles for expanded social opportunity, and the high school graduation rate had risen to 75 percent. Yet, over the past 25 years, the unimaginable occurred. Despite growth in knowledge and resources to assist schools, our nation has made **virtually no progress** in graduating more students from high school, ready for college, the workforce, and a productive future.

Three years ago, Bill Gates called America's high schools "obsolete," and, more recently, he testified before the Congress that "every student in America should graduate from high school ready for college, career, and life. Every child, no exceptions." Governors mobilized early, signing a 50-state compact to provide accurate information on actual graduation rates in our schools, and the U.S. Department of Education has taken executive action to fulfill the promise of the compact.

A report sharing the perspectives of dropouts, *The Silent Epidemic*, provided new evidence and hope that most students could stay on track to graduate. The report prompted media attention, including a *Time* magazine cover story, titled "Dropout Nation," and two Oprah Winfrey shows, coverage that alerted millions of Americans to our alarming dropout epidemic. A National Summit

on America's Silent Epidemic resulted in reforms, legislation, and initiatives to meet the challenge head on.

Yet, today . . .

Despite media attention and the new priority given to education reform, about one-third of all public high school students and one-half of minority students fail to graduate with their class every year.

This is a high school dropout epidemic, one that threatens our ability to keep pace with an increasingly demanding and globally competitive economy. It is costing our nation billions of dollars every year and is diminishing the productivity and happiness of millions of our young people. We can and must do better.

Where America's Promise fits in

The America's Promise Alliance is a national network of more than 230 organizations. Their research, *Every Child, Every Promise*, shows a strong correlation between children who experience what the Alliance calls the "*Five Promises*" and their ability to become successful adults. These *Five Promises* are caring adults, safe places, a healthy start, effective education, and opportunities to help others. The Alliance has a five-year goal to provide these *Five Promises* to at least 15 million at-risk children.

The promise of an effective education demands that we focus on the dropout crisis. We realize, however, that no promise exists in a vacuum. Research shows that the more support youth have, both inside and outside the classroom, the more likely they are to stay in school. We must invest in the whole child, and that means finding solutions that involve the family, the school, and the community.

Similarly, the Alliance realizes that improved graduation rates alone do not meet the promise of an effective education. A high school diploma does not yet

guarantee that a student has the knowledge and skills necessary for success in college, work, and life.

This issue is not only complex, it is local. The battle to keep our youth in school and on course will be won school-by-school, student-by-student in local communities. That is why the Alliance commissioned *Grad Nation* . . . and this is where you fit in.

Where you fit in

The goal of *Grad Nation* is to give you and your community the tools you need to:

- rally your community to end the dropout crisis
- understand the dimensions of the dropout challenge in your region
- develop an effective plan to combat high dropout rates and prepare youth for advanced learning in and after high school
- build strong partnerships to make lasting change happen

We hope the guidebook's resources will help you, your schools, your community, and your state to win the battle against our national dropout crisis and help America become a graduation nation.

How to use the guidebook

Grad Nation contains research-based guidance for addressing the dropout crisis, along with ready-to-print tools and links to additional online resources.

We recognize that one size does not fit all, so you will not find step-by-step instructions for a standardized program. Instead, *Grad Nation* provides information and tools for developing and implementing a customized program that's right for your community.

In fact, your community may already have undertaken some of the efforts we suggest, or you may be just starting out. You may want to start slowly, or you may feel ready to forge ahead with a number of efforts at the same time.

The guidebook is divided into four parts:

- Rallying Your Community to End the Dropout Crisis
- Understanding Your Community's Dropout Crisis
- Solutions for Comprehensively Addressing Your Community's Dropout Crisis
- Moving Forward to Create Lasting Change

On the left-hand side of each page, you'll find valuable information on the topic or measure being discussed. This is accompanied by "A Deeper Look" — references to online resources that provide additional information.

On the right-hand side of each page, you'll see suggestions for specific action — what you can do — along with links to tools to help you do the job. These tools, identified by this symbol , include:

- informational handouts to build support for community action
- forms and tables to help you organize and analyze local data
- charts to guide your decision making

As your efforts progress, be sure to revisit this guidebook at:
http://www.americaspromise.org/GradNation
We plan to update this guidebook content periodically as new information becomes available and as communities share what they have learned and what has worked best for them. You'll want to take advantage of new developments, including an upcoming mechanism for sharing your community's experience and knowledge.

Finally, at the end of the guidebook, we provide a list of organizations to which you can turn for assistance.

I. Rallying your Community to End the Dropout Crisis

No single person can combat a community's dropout crisis. You will need the committed support of many in your community — school- and district-based educators, parents, students, citizens, business executives, university and community college leaders, non-profit and faith-based organization leaders and policymakers.

Some people from your community will provide insights and guidance, some will provide resources, and some will provide services, in school and out of school, through "wraparound support." Others may be able to take your campaign to the next level, recruiting representatives of local and state agencies, as well as state and national organizations, to push for new policies and to provide services.

Reaching out to your entire community and winning broad-based support is vital, but it will take effort.

This section will help you rally the community support needed.

Here is how to use this section:

If you need to convince your community that there is a dropout problem that needs to be solved, go to

Demonstrating that a dropout crisis exists

If you need to highlight the national and local costs of not graduating from high school, go to

Demonstrating the crippling costs of the crisis

If you need to show that the dropout problem can be effectively addressed, go to

Demonstrating that the dropout crisis is solvable

If you need to make the case that your community needs to take action to end the

dropout crisis, go to

Demonstrating that your community has an essential role to play

If you need to gather evidence to better inform those who argue that there is no crisis or that it is not essential for every student to graduate from high school prepared for adult success, go to

Confronting skeptics

Demonstrating that a dropout crisis exists

Communities cannot address problems they do not recognize, understand, or accept, yet dropout statistics can be frightening and denial tempting. To rally support for action, your community will need to confront the harsh facts.

A good first step is to understand for yourself and then share with others the national dropout crisis data. This will let community members know that the dropout crisis affects our entire nation and that they are not in it on their own with fingers pointed at them.

The national numbers are startling:

- Every 26 seconds, another student gives up on school, resulting in more than 1.2 million students dropping out of high school every year.
- Research puts the graduation rate between 68 and 75 percent.
- Nearly one-third of all public high school students fail to graduate with their class.
- The dropout epidemic disproportionately affects young people who are low-income, children of single parents, or ceratin minorities — nearly one-half of all African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans in public school will not graduate with their class.

Educate community members and leaders that a dropout problem exists.

Develop talking points for presentations and to distribute as fact sheets.

Use Cities in Crisis report[1] and the fact sheet:

What's At Stake Nationally

As you begin to rally the people in your community, you can use the following presentation, easily adapting and expanding it to include your local data and challenges:

***The Silent Epidemic* PowerPoint**

1 http://www.americaspromise.org/uploadedFiles/AmericasPromiseAlliance/Dropout_Crisis/SWANSONCitiesInCrisis040108.pdf

- The dropout epidemic is more severe in some areas — both urban and rural — than in others: Approximately 15 percent of high schools in America produce close to half of the nation's dropouts and over two-thirds of its minority dropouts.
- In nearly 2,000 high schools in the U.S., 40 percent of typical freshman class students drop out by their senior year.
- Graduation rates have remained largely unchanged over the last 30 years.
- Among developed countries, the U.S. ranks 18th in high school graduation rates and 15th in college graduation rates.
- Even with a diploma, only half of graduates leave high school prepared to succeed in college, career, and life.

A DEEPER LOOK

For good sources of data and information on the dropout issue, see:

- ***Diploma Counts* series**[1]
- ***The Silent Epidemic* report**[2]
  A 2006 report by Civic Enterprises, prepared in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, explains the dropout crisis from former students' perspectives.
- **The Alliance for Excellent Education**[3]
- ***Locating the Dropout Crisis***[4]

1 http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2008/06/05/index.html
2 http://www.silentepidemic.org
3 http://www.all4ed.org/about_the_crisis/schools/state_and_local_info/promotingpower
4 http://www.every1graduates.org/PDFs/PromotingPower/Locating_the_Dropout_Crisis.pdf

Show how your high school graduation rate compares to your state, other schools and the nation.

Use the State Profiles available at the Editorial Projects in Education's "Diplomas Count" website.[2]

2 http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/06/05/40sgb.h27.html

Demonstrating the crippling costs of the crisis

Dropping out of high school has a lifelong, devastating impact on a person's future.

Ability to become a productive, stable citizen

- Dropouts are more likely than are high school graduates to be unemployed, in poor health, living in poverty, on public assistance, and single parents of children who drop out of high school.
- Dropouts were more than twice as likely as high school graduates to slip into poverty in a single year and three times more likely than college graduates to be unemployed in 2004.
- Dropouts are more than eight times as likely to be in jail or in prison than are high school graduates.
- Dropouts are four times less likely to volunteer than are college graduates and half as likely to vote or participate in community projects, and they represent only 3 percent of actively engaged citizens in the U.S. today.

Economic impact

- The average annual income for a high school dropout in 2005 was $17,299, compared to $26,933 for a high school graduate, a difference of $9,634 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2006). College graduates earn on average $1 million more over a lifetime than do high school dropouts. In other words, dropping out has the potential to be a million-dollar mistake.

Gather data on the social and economic costs of the dropout crisis in your state, city, and/or county.

Use tools found in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT website[3] to complete the fact sheet:

State and Community Profile

Determine the economic costs of the dropout crisis in your state.

You can download this fact sheet from the Alliance for Excellent Education website.[4]

3 http://www.kidscount.org

4 http://www.all4ed.org/what_you_can_do/ed_in_your_state

- If the students who dropped out of the Class of 2007 had graduated, the nation's economy would have benefited from an additional $329 billion in income over these students' lifetimes.
- The government would reap $45 billion in extra tax revenues and lower costs for public health, crime, and welfare payments if the number of high school dropouts among 20-year olds in the U.S. today, who number more than 700,000 individuals, were cut in half.
- If our dropout rate remains the same for the next 10 years, the result will be a loss to the nation of $3 trillion.

Idleness

What in fact do dropouts do after they drop out of school? The answer for many is — not much.

- Analysis of recent census data shows that close to **one-third** of 18- to 24-year-olds who have dropped out of school are simply idle, neither in the labor force nor participating in educational programs.
- The idleness rate climbs to **more than 40 percent** for high school dropouts from families with incomes below poverty level. This means they are not acquiring the skills needed to earn a livelihood, let alone support a family. Compare these rates with the low, 8 percent idleness rates for 18- to 24-year-olds who completed high school.

If we can reverse these trends, society will benefit across the board. Research shows that high school graduates live longer; are more likely to raise healthier, better educated children; and are less likely to commit crimes, be teen parents, or rely on government health care or other public assistance such as food stamps. Our nation will benefit from graduates' increased purchasing power, see higher levels of productivity from our workforce, and collect more taxes.

A DEEPER LOOK

For an excellent summary of the cost to the nation, see:

- **"High Cost of High School Dropouts"**[5]

For more information on the connection between dropping out and idleness, see:

- **The Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire**[6]

Demonstrating that the dropout crisis is solvable

The message to convey to your community is that the dropout crisis is a real and significant problem that affects the whole community, but it is solvable with sufficient community effort and foresight. There is light at the end of the tunnel.

Our confidence is based on facts — and lots of them.

We now have a lot of information about and insight into:

- who drops out and why
- what will help students stay on the graduation path
- interventions and reforms that have proven successful

One of the most powerful forces working in our favor is that **students do not want to drop out**. They want to graduate. The vast majority of students who drop out have extreme regrets, many calling it the worst decision of their lives.

Who drops out and why

It is now possible to identify who among 3rd-, 6th-, and 9th-grade students will likely drop out of high school unless ongoing interventions occur. We can turn

5 http:/www.all4ed.org/files/archive/publications/HighCost.pdf

6 http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu

these school-based early warning systems into appropriate supports within our schools and communities. We can identify problems early and address them before students become dropout statistics.

Why do they drop out? *The Silent Epidemic* report itemizes students' reasons:

- Nearly 70 percent of dropouts said they were not motivated to work hard, and two-thirds would have worked harder if more had been demanded of them.
- 70 percent were confident they could have graduated, including a majority with low GPAs.
- Approximately one-third left for personal reasons (to get a job, become a parent, or care for a family member), and one-third cited "failing in school" as a major factor.
- More than 80 percent said their chances of staying in school would have increased if classes were more interesting and provided opportunities for real-world learning.
- Four out of five wanted better teachers, and 75% wanted smaller classes with more individualized instruction.
- The majority said that higher expectations from teachers and parents and better supervision in the classroom would have helped keep them in school. Most students wanted a strong relationship with at least one adult in the school.

What will help students stay on the graduation path

We know from experience and research that students need constant, on-going support to get back and stay on the graduation path. There is no "quick cure" or vaccination. Attendance, behavior and course-performance (the ABCs of dropout prevention) are the first symptoms of trouble that we are able to influence, and we should concentrate our first efforts there.

Interventions and reforms that have proven successful

We now are discovering which measures show solid evidence of success, and researchers are testing and evaluating other potentially effective approaches. **Most promising are efforts that combine more personalized education with enhanced academic supports and college and career ready curricula.**

Wraparound supports from families and communities can also play a critical role. These include supplying adult advocates for children, parent engagement strategies, individualized graduation plans, and additional supports for struggling students. It is also significant that many of the solutions students themselves suggest are the very ones research says work.

Part III of *Grad Nation* provides a detailed examination of the critical components of a comprehensive approach to addressing the dropout crisis.

Demonstrating that your community needs to take action

To build and sustain the coalition your community will need to end its dropout crisis, you will need to convince a broad range of community members that they have an essential role to play.

You will need to be able to:

- Identify the critical role of the community in ending the dropout crisis.
- Confront skeptics who claim a dropout crisis does not exist or that it's not necessary for all students to graduate from high school prepared for adult success.

Refer to Parts II and III of *Grad Nation* to:

- identify what your community can do to complement the work of schools and districts
- analyze current student supports and supplement them
- examine existing policies and practices
- identify and help transform schools through which most dropouts pass

Identifying the critical role of the community in ending the dropout crisis

For too long schools and school districts have been viewed as the primary entity responsible for raising graduation rates, along with parents and the students themselves. Communities pay the costs of the dropout crisis financially, socially, and civically but too often expect the school system to solve it alone.

The challenges are too multi-faceted for most schools and districts to be able to succeed at this mission unaided. Continuing business as usual will guarantee the same result — a continuing dropout crisis that drains the community.

Communities must be a driving force for ending the dropout crisis and ensuring that those who do graduate are ready for college, work and life. They need to complement the work of their schools and districts, and drive and sustain the solutions for the long haul.

Communities can help by analyzing the whole range of student supports in and out of school and by ensuring that they are effective, sufficient, and provided to every student who needs them. Communities can also lead the charge in examining existing policies and practices around attendance, discipline, grading, grade promotion, and the legal dropout age to see if they are supportive of graduating all students prepared for the advanced learning now required to earn a family wage and achieve adult success.

Communities can identify and help transform the middle and high schools through which most dropouts pass. Perhaps most importantly, communities can sustain progress and forward momentum through changes in school district administration.

Confronting skeptics

As you work to build the will to solve the dropout crisis in your community, you may face skepticism and even resistance.

Dropout statistics

Some community members may not believe there is a dropout crisis because they have seen official statistics that underestimate dropout rates. Others, because of their own experience, may think that nearly everyone in your community graduates.

You need to present them with the facts about official dropout and graduation rate data, including the unfortunate fact that official statistics on dropouts can be misleading. In many states and communities, only "official dropouts" are counted — that is, students who actually inform the school they are dropping out. However, most dropouts do not officially announce themselves. They simply stop coming to school, and their schools are left to determine what happened. Schools often lack the resources and time to investigate, so they often make overly optimistic guesses about students who have left. As a result, many dropouts fall through the cracks of official record keeping.

Often, a state or school district calculates its dropout rate by comparing the number of students who officially dropped out in a given year to the total number of students enrolled in high school or even, in some cases, the school district. This makes the dropout rate appear low.

When graduation and dropout rates are calculated by following groups of first-time 9th graders and tracking how many graduate and drop out over four- to six-year periods, a much more severe picture of the dropout problem often emerges.

This is the way a 7 percent "official" dropout rate can mask a 50 percent graduation rate: Suppose a high school has 400 9th graders, 250 10th graders, 180 11th graders, and 170 12th graders, for a total enrollment of 1,000. School records

Show skeptics how the official graduation rate used in many states is higher than estimates of the U.S. Department of Education or independent researchers.

Use the chart:

What Are the Graduation Rate Results Produced by Different Methods of Calculation?

show that 70 students told the school that they were dropping out, which produces a 7 percent dropout rate (70/1000).

A more accurate dropout rate is found by following the **entering** 9th-grade group. In the first year there were 300 **new** 9th graders; in the second year 200 of the original 9th graders progressed to the 10th grade. In the third year there were 170 of the original 9th graders. In the fourth year (senior year) there were 160 of the original 9th graders, of whom 150 graduated on time, of course subtracting any transfers of students to other schools and adding any transfers into the school. This method produces a 50 percent dropout rate (150/300).

As of 2008, however, only 16 states are reporting graduation rates using accurate methods. (See *Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date 2008* in "A Deeper Look" below.)

The good news is that, over time, official statistics will get better. The US Department of Education is requiring all states to move to a uniform graduation rate and to compare how students of every race and background are performing. In the last several years, governors have agreed on a uniform, meaningful way to calculate graduation rates. All states will implement this approach for the 2008–09 school year and beyond. At the same time, many states have invested or are investing in sophisticated data systems to keep track of students.

The value of a diploma

Some in your community may believe that a high school diploma is not necessary; that students who drop out can still make their way in the world just fine.

Community members may be able to point to a success story or two, to someone in their family, a notable person in the community or nation, or themselves as examples of people who did not earn a high school diploma but went on to lead a productive and successful life.

There will always be talented, hard-working people who find success after dropping out of high school. But in the 21st century, they will be few and far between.

Illustrate how a low "official" dropout rate can mask a much higher rate using the example at left.

Today, the odds that a high school dropout will strike it rich are slim to none, and the chances that he or she will find employment that will support a family and a middle-class lifestyle are just as unlikely. As we have shown, the data paint a picture of too many unemployed dropouts.

One specific argument you may face is from people who argue that passing GED (General Educational Development) tests is equivalent to a regular high school diploma and substitutes for a high school education. One study estimates that close to half of all dropouts eventually receive a GED.

In fact, many experts say that people who earn a GED or other alternative certificate earn significantly less than do high school graduates and have a much more difficult time getting into and completing college. Only 10 percent of GED holders earn a college degree, compared to 27 percent of high school graduates.

For dropouts, a GED is better than nothing, but for today's students and for our communities, staying in school is the best choice by far.

A DEEPER LOOK

ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY

For a succinct discussion of the negative impact on our nation and communities of creating two classes of citizens — those with a good education who are able to achieve upward mobility and those who lack a high school diploma and are cut off from pursuing the American Dream — see:

- **Educational Testing Service on America's Perfect Storm**[7]

DROPOUT STATISTICS

For a closer look at the different ways to calculate graduation rates, and their impact on data, see:

- **The Pew Partnership for Civic Change's *Learning to Finish* initiative website**[8] **includes a helpful discussion about this point.**

7 http://www.ets.org/Media/Education_Topics/pdf/AmericasPerfectStorm.pdf

8 http://www.learningtofinish.org

- **Alliance for Excellent Education report, *Who's Counted? Who's Counting? Understanding High School Graduation Rates***[9]
- **The Data Quality Campaign**[10]

For a look at the newly adopted, uniform methodology for gathering state dropout data, states that are currently using accurate methods to calculate graduation rates, and when your state will do so, see:

- ***Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date, 2008***[11]

VALUE OF A DIPLOMA

According to *Making Good on a Promise*, an April 2006 study by Jobs for the Future, close to half of dropouts eventually receive a GED. Students earn a GED certificate by passing tests that, according to the American Council on Education (ACE), only 60 percent of high school graduates could pass. Career data on GED holders would dispute the GED's value as a substitute for a diploma.

To read the full report, see:

- **Jobs for the Future, *Making Good on a Promise***[12]

Should GED recipients be counted as high school graduates? By definition, GED recipients have dropped out of school; the system has failed them in some way, and schools should not receive "credit" as if they had succeeded in educating and graduating these students. For these reasons, GED recipients are not counted as graduates under the No Child Left Behind Act, nor are they counted as graduates in most of the modern methods that calculate high school graduation rates. Oddly they are included in Census data, which therefore over-reports graduation rates. To learn about the extraordinary efforts of community-based organizations to get GED recipients and disconnected youth to reenter the education pathway, see:

- **Youth Development Institute of the Fund for the City of New York, *Building a Better Bridge: Helping Young Adults Enter and Succeed in College***[13]

9 http://www.all4ed.org/files/WhosCounting.pdf

10 http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/Publications-Every_Student_Counted-073107.pdf

11 http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0807GRADCOUNTS.PDF

12 http:/www.jff.org/JFF_KC_Pages.php?KC_M_ID=287&WhichLevel=1&lv1_id=4&lv2_id=0&lv3_id=0

13 http://www.ydinstitute.org/resources/publications/building%20a%20better%20bridge.pdf

II. Understanding Your Community's Dropout Crisis

To end your community's dropout crisis you will need to develop a clear understanding of its characteristics. Ultimately, you will need to examine the extent of your community's crisis, the reasons behind it, existing and needed student supports, existing policies, and the college-readiness of your students, even if they do graduate.

Here is how to use this section

If you need to learn how big your dropout crisis is and which schools have the greatest number of students in need of additional supports, go to

How big is your dropout crisis?

Which schools have the most dropouts?

If you need to conduct an in-depth investigation (working with your school districts and possibly with a research partner) into when and why students are dropping out in your community, go to:

When and why are students dropping out?

If you need to examine how well existing student supports address your community's crisis and to identify what more needs to be done, go to

How does your community's response measure up?

If you need to review policies and see if existing policies on issues such as attendance, grading, grade promotion, disciplinary actions, and the legal dropout age are helping more students stay in school or inadvertently driving them out, go to

Are there policies and practices that need to be changed?

If you need to look at the college and career readiness of your community's high school graduates to ensure that a high school diploma means that students are prepared to succeed in post-secondary schooling and training, go to

Are your high school graduates ready to succeed in college?

How big is your dropout crisis? Which schools have the most dropouts?

An important first step towards understanding your community's dropout crisis is to establish its extent and location. To do this you need to answer three questions.

- What percent of the students who start the ninth grade in your community do not graduate from high school on time within four years and at any time?
- Each year, how many students in your community drop out of school?
- Which middle and high schools do most of your dropouts pass through?

Although these are essential questions, they are often difficult to answer because until very recently few school districts or states collected and published accurate graduation rate and dropout data. Many still do not.

As of August 2008, if your community is located in the following states, you can have faith in the graduation rate information published by your state department of education because it will be based on an accurate methodology:

Arkansas

Arizona

Colorado

Delaware

Find quick estimates of your state and school district graduation rates.

Use The Pew Partnership for Civic Change's *Learning to Finish*, graduation rate calculator.[1]

Conduct a detailed examination of your community's state and district graduation rates and see how they compare with other states and districts.

You can generally find the graduation rate for your school districts by going to the Editorial Projects in Education's (EPE) research center.[2]

1 http:/www.learningtofinish.org/calculator
2 http:/www.edweek.org/apps/maps

Florida

Indiana

Louisiana

Massachusetts

Minnesota

Mississippi

New York

North Carolina

Rhode Island

South Carolina

Texas

Vermont

If you live in a different state, it may be among those that will be publishing accurate graduation rates in the next year or two. In the meantime, you can find reasonable estimates from a number of sources.

You can establish a ballpark figure on the number of high school students in need of support to graduate by asking your school districts for two pieces of information:

- the number of students enrolled in the 9th grade
- the number of diplomas awarded last year

The difference between the two will usually give you an idea of how many students in your community are in danger of not graduating, assuming no significant increase in historic enrollment in 9th grade.

Identify which local high schools likely have low and high graduation rates.

Go to the Alliance for Excellent Education's website for data that allows you to identify high schools with both very low and high graduation rates.[3]

See if your graduation rates have been getting better or worse and how they compare to the overall graduation rate in your state and the nation.

Go to the worksheet:

Estimating the Magnitude of the Dropout Crisis In Our Community

3 http://www.all4ed.org/about_the_crisis/schools/state_and_local_info/list

When and why are students dropping out?

To solve its dropout crisis, your community will need a detailed understanding of when and why your students are dropping out. This will require an in-depth investigation, the involvement of your school district(s), often an outside research partner and perhaps six months to a year to complete.

You should not wait to launch your efforts to end your community's dropout crisis until you have this data. There is much you can do and much progress you can make while it is being collected and analyzed. However, it will be important to know when and why your students are dropping out to refine your solutions and maximize their impact.

When are students dropping out?

To get a handle on the dropout challenge, you need to learn how far students are from graduation when they drop out. Most states require at least 20–24 credits for a standard diploma and have course distribution requirements among the different subject matter areas.

By looking at school transcript and attendance records of recent dropouts, you can determine:

- What percentage of dropouts are only a few credits shy of those needed for graduation?
- What percentage of dropouts have one-half to three-quarters of the credits needed for graduation?
- What percentage of dropouts have one-quarter to one-half of the credits needed for graduation?
- What percentage have less than a quarter of the credits needed for graduation?

Review school transcript and attendance records of recent dropouts.

To see one way to collect data on when dropouts leave school see the chart:

Dropout Profiles Related to Attendance, Credits, Credit Accumulation, Age, Withdrawal

To see how to capture dropout information if computer systems are not set up to provide transcript data examine:

Individual High School Dropout Transcript Analysis

and

School Performance Trends for Dropouts and/or Withdrawals with Unknown Destinations

- Failure in which courses is most associated with dropping out?

Another piece of information is vitally important: How old are the students when they drop out? Are many staying in school, getting older every year, but not earning credits? Work with your school system to gather this information.

Finally, it is important to understand the attendance histories of students who drop out. How many were essentially part-time students the year before they dropped out, attending 70 percent of the time or less? How many were chronically absent, missing 20 or more days of school per year starting in the 9th grade? Starting in the middle grades? In elementary school?

Why are students dropping out?

There are several categories of reasons for students to drop out of school.

- **Life Events:** Students drop out because of an event or a need outside of school. Pregnancy, incarceration or out-of-home placement in the juvenile justice system, health problems, aging out of foster care, caring for an ill family member, or needing to work to support themselves or family members are the most frequent factors.
- **Fade Outs:** Students drop out because they no longer see the point of staying in school. Often these are students with decent grades and attendance records who at some point become bored, frustrated, or disillusioned with school and believe they can make it in life on their own without a high school diploma.
- **Push Outs:** Some students may be viewed as behavioral problems or low achievers, and/or they seldom attend school. Once these students reach the legal dropout age, sometimes their schools apply administrative rules — related to suspensions, inadequate credits earned by a certain age, or chronic absenteeism — to remove them from school or transfer them to another school.

- **Failure to Succeed in School:** Students drop out of school because they do not pass enough courses or earn enough credits to be promoted to the next grade. Many of these dropouts begin to fall off the path to graduation in the middle grades, where they begin to fail courses, miss a lot of school, or misbehave. The key point for promotion — or failure — is from 9th to 10th grade. These students often have to repeat the entire 9th grade and, without any supports, do no better the second time. At some point after repeated attempts to succeed (though often with decreasing effort), it becomes clear to them that they will never succeed in school, so they drop out.

It is important to develop a good estimate of the percentage of students who are dropping out in your community because of "life events," "fade out," "push out," or "failing to succeed." This will help your community pinpoint the kinds of prevention, intervention, and recovery programs that will best meet student needs.

For instance, you may need to consider:

- Rapid credit-earning programs for students who need just a few more credits to graduate
- In- and out-of-school catch-up, tutoring, and mentoring programs for students with a moderate need for support
- Programs that combine schooling with work opportunities for students who need to support themselves while earning a moderate number of school credits
- Intensive supports to keep struggling students on track and successful in high school; it is very difficult for students to recover if they are over-age with few high school credits

Getting the answers

Data analysis of dropout statistics will provide valuable insight. Students who leave school suddenly with few warning signs may have experienced a life event. Students who progressed without problems into the later years of high school but

then show signs of disengagement the semester before they left may well be fade outs. Students who have been exhibiting warning signs — such as poor attendance, behavior, and/or grades in the middle and early high school years — are dropouts experiencing failure to succeed or are pushouts.

Another way to learn why students are leaving school is to ask them. There are several ways to do this — surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

Surveys, of course, are a uniform set of questions asked of a group. The questions are structured so the answers can be tallied at the end of the survey.

Interviews are questions asked one-on-one, and focus groups are group interviews of a particular segment of people, such as dropouts.

Ask middle and high school students why they miss school.

Attendance is often a key barometer of a student's connection with schooling. The majority of students who drop out first stop attending school on a regular basis. In many cases their attendance decreases over several years. In the year before dropping out, it is common for students to attend school less than 70 percent of the time. For this reason, it is helpful to ask 6th- through 12th-grade students why they miss school.

In large schools, consider surveying a sample of students rather than all students, such as sampling every third homeroom.

Students are more open when a survey is anonymous.

The survey itself can be quite simple. Ask students to report how many days so far or in the current term they have missed for different reasons, including personal choice, school climate reasons, and home or community factors.

Survey students on the reasons they do not attend school. For survey questions, see:

Attendance Survey

Ask students about their school and classroom experience.

Students often say they start to turn off from schooling because they are not being challenged or, in their words, "not much is going on." For this reason, it is very helpful to examine students' attitudes and learn how much they value their teachers, the classroom learning environment, and the instruction they are receiving.

From the student surveys, you can get a sense of whether students are getting grade-level, standards-based, high-quality instruction, and if not, why not.

Surveys can also reveal:

- Are academic expectations geared toward college and career readiness, and are quality instructional materials available?
- Is there a need for experiences outside the classroom—such as job shadowing, work study, or service-learning, for example—that connect classroom learning to skills they need for their careers and for life?
- Are too many students absent or misbehaving, creating lost learning opportunities for all?
- Do students feel safe coming to school and in school?

We know these are complex questions, but having an insight into the educational environment is critical to shaping responses that will help curb our high school dropout crisis.

Ask dropouts and students who appear close to dropping out, why?

You'll also want to ask dropouts themselves about the final act — dropping out. What causes them to leave school before they earn a high school diploma?

Conduct a survey of students on their view of classroom and school experiences. For sample surveys and ideas, go to:

Surveys About Students' Classroom and School Experiences

See how students and teachers can have very different views of classroom practice and school climate. Examine:

Different Perspectives Chart

It can be difficult to locate dropouts, and even when you do, you won't be able to determine whether they are representative of those you can't find. This does not mean you should not try.

You might want to consider creating an audio or video recording of dropouts. The student voice is powerful, and hearing dropouts discuss why they left school can have a galvanizing effect on a community. It puts a human face and story behind the issue. Dropouts also can display tremendous strength, which offers hope to those who might think it's too late to bring dropouts back to school once they have left.

A complementary approach is to conduct focus groups or interviews with students who **appear to be close to dropping out** — those students who are currently attending less than 75 percent of the time. These students are easier to find, and you can make sure that you interview a representative sample by interviewing every third student, in alphabetical order, who meets the lack-of-attendance criterion. You should try to interview about 10 students in each school that produces a significant number of the district's dropouts.

Don't focus only on students in alternative schools; be sure to include students from traditional high schools as well.

If possible, you may want to consider training a peer or near-peer to conduct the interviews. It will be important to probe for both nonschool- as well as school-related reasons for a student's decreasing attendance and to ask the students to reflect on what might help and/or stand in the way of their graduating. Remember that, depending on your district's policies, you may need to get informed consent from the students being interviewed.

The results of the interviews can then be used not only to inform the longer-term dropout reduction strategy, but also to devise plans and supports that will encourage students with decreasing attendance to stay in school.

Interview dropouts, possibly creating an audio or video recording.

To guide development of your interview or focus group questions, see:

Kentucky's Student Needs Form[4], a checklist of indicators which have been associated with students at risk of dropping out of the education system

and

The National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS:88) of early dropouts, leaving school by the end of 10th grade

NELS Dropout Survey and Findings

4 http://www.ihdi.uky.edu/dropout-prevention

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MODELS FOR ANALYSIS

These investigations into the characteristics of dropouts and the timing of when students drop out can serve as models for an analysis of your community:

- ***The Silent Epidemic*** **(Civic Enterprises/Gates Foundation)**[1]
- **Consortium on Chicago School Research's numerous publications examine indicators and outcomes for Chicago Public Schools students throughout the school and college continuum**[2]
- ***Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis, 2000-2005***[3]
- **Parthenon Reports on New York City, Boston, and Chicago schools' graduation improvement strategies**
  Boston[4], New York[5], Chicago[6]
- **California Dropout Research Project**[7]
- ***The Challenge of On-Time Arrival: The Seven Year Flight Paths of Baltimore's Sixth Graders of 1999-2000***[8]

SAMPLE SURVEYS

- **The annual Chicago Public Schools' Connection Survey.**
  Its questions address students' views of a) safe and respectful climate; b) academic rigor; c) student support; and d) social and emotional learning[9]
- **The Center for Education and Evaluation, University of Indiana, annual High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE).**
  More than 80,000 students from 22 states shared their perceptions of how much work they do and in what areas, what interests them, and what areas need improvement[10]

1 http://www.civicenterprises.net/pdfs/thesilentepidemic3-06.pdf
2 http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publications.php
3 http://www.projectuturn.net/downloads/pdf/Unfulfilled_Promise_Project_U-turn.pdf
4 http://www.boston.k12.ma.us/bps/news/Parthenon.ppt
5 http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/119CD965-BC52-4579-A37A-5E33C1364D2A/31611/FindingsoftheOfficeofMultiplePathwaystoGraduation.pdf
6 http://www.cps.k12.il.us/AboutCPS/PressReleases/Feb_08/Summit_release_A.pdf
7 http://www.lmri.ucsb.edu/dropouts/pubs_statbriefs.htm
8 http://www.baltimore-berc.org/pdfs/SIXTH%20pathways5-13-08.pdf
9 http://www.cpstoolkit.cps.k12.il.us
10 http://www.indiana.edu/~ceep/hssse

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- **The School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**
  Collects information about factors that affect learning, including neighborhood and family conditions, peer and family support for education, the school learning climate, personal beliefs and well-being, and attitudes toward school and behavior.[11]
- **In Fall 2008, Civic Enterprises, the author of *The Silent Epidemic* report, will release new research that shares the views of teachers and administrators on the high school dropout crisis.**
- ***Gaining Traction, Gaining Ground*, a 2005 report by The Education Trust**
  Examines school practices that made the difference between high- and low-performing schools serving substantial populations of low-income students.[12]
- **Casey Family Programs' mission is to provide and improve—and ultimately to prevent the need for—foster care.**
  Its ***A Road Map for Learning*** is a guide for everyone working towards successful educational outcomes for youth in foster care or out-of-home care.[13]

Students frequently mention the need for challenging material combined with caring support from educators. Maintaining high expectations for students while taking their individual circumstances into account is also a common theme. These books explore students' perceptions as well as school practices that create a quality learning environment:

- ***Listening to Urban Kids: School Reform and the Teachers They Want***
  Gives urban middle school students a forum for explaining what they believe are the keys to their academic success. The results reveal that they, like older students, also want to be challenged and supported by educators.[14]
- ***Fires in the Bathroom: Advice for Teachers from High School Students***
  Offers educators insight into the minds of teenage students in several cities. To listen to the author's reflections on the book, visit the website.[15]

11 http://www.schoolsuccessprofile.org

12 http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/6226B581-83C3-4447-9CE7-31C5694B9EF6/0/GainingTractionGaining-Ground.pdf

13 http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/RoadMapForLearning.htm

14 http://books.google.com/books?id=Gio6SWqtsnMC&dq=Listening+to+Urban+Kids+School+Reform

15 http://forum.wgbh.org/wgbh/forum.php?lecture_id=1732

How does your community's response measure up?

To address its dropout crisis effectively, your community will need to analyze how effective its current response is. Fundamentally the community needs to know if current student supports are sufficient – and closely enough aligned with school life – to enable all its students to graduate prepared for college, career, and civic life.

You will want to examine your elementary, middle, and high schools; existing wraparound student services, and out-of-school supports (e.g., after-school, summer learning, parental involvement).

- Are current supports directed at the right students at the right time?
- Are current supports comprehensive and effective?
- What other responses are needed?
- Which efforts aren't working and need to be changed, modified, or abandoned?

Are current programs directed at the right students at the right time?

If students successfully navigate four key transition points, chances are they will graduate prepared for adult success. These transition points are:

1. transitioning into school — pre-K to elementary school
2. transitioning into the middle grades
3. transitioning into high school
4. transitioning from high school into college or postsecondary training

Catalogue all the student supports and wraparound services provided to students in your community.

Include before-, in-, and after- school and summer-school supports. Look at student supports specifically targeted toward dropout prevention or recovery as well as efforts to improve overall student involvement, school success, and transitions to college and career.

Compare existing student supports to the levels and types of student needs.

Learn the percentage of students in your community who are unable to commit fully to schooling because they are distracted by serious health and family issues.

At each transition point, many students will need both academic and social supports. Students in middle and high school, for example, will want some real-world opportunities to link to classroom learning.

You also will want to determine whether your community's academic, social and other supports are:

- targeting when and where students are falling off the path to high school graduation
- detecting and responding to chronic absenteeism and academic struggles as early as elementary school
- focusing on the ABC's — Attendance, Behavior, and Course Performance in middle school, during the critical transition from 8th to 9th grade and throughout the 9th and 10th grades
- enabling a successful transition from high school to college or post-secondary training

Are current programs comprehensive and effective?

- Do current efforts reinforce and support one another, or do they duplicate one another or even work against each other?
- Which efforts have demonstrated a substantial impact on reducing the drop-out rate, increasing the graduation rate, or improving college readiness and preparing students for adult success? These are the strategies you will want to build on and weave into the additional actions you take.

Are there policies and practices that need to be changed?

Policies and practices at the state, district, and school levels also influence graduation rates. They can either help students stay on the graduation path or lower their odds of graduating. By understanding your school district's policies better and what research says about their effects, you can assess policy changes that will serve your students better and begin to address your dropout challenge. A wide range of what may be viewed as customary, benign or even important individual school- and district-wide policies and practices can inadvertently encourage, enable or fail to prevent dropping out. These include:

- **Attendance policies.** In some districts, no formal response to student absence is required until students miss a certain number of consecutive days (e.g., five) or a total number of days (e.g., 10). This tells schools it is okay to do nothing until it is almost too late. It also leads some students to become expert manipulators of the system, always missing one day short of a mandatory response. A better policy demands that every absence have a response. Schools need to have accurate lists of who is in school and who is not and mechanisms to reach parents and students.

- **Grade retention policies.** Social promotion does not work, but neither does holding students back, especially once they reach adolescence. When secondary students are held back, they often become dropouts. In high-poverty school districts, the graduation rate for over-age 8th graders can be 20 percent or lower! Intensive and continuous in- and out-of-school supports are needed as soon as a student begins to struggle. It is much more effective to use extended school days, Saturdays, and summer school to enable students to catch up than to hold them back.

- **Grade promotion policies.** In some districts, if students do not earn enough credits to be promoted from a grade, they must repeat the entire grade —

Conduct a local policy audit and plan next steps. Use:

Policy Audit and Next Policy Steps

retaking classes they already passed. Students should be required to retake only the classes they have failed and should receive supports so they can rejoin their peers mid-year or earlier.

- **Grading policies.** In some districts, students are graded on a scale from 0 to 100, and students receive 0s when they do not turn in assignments or they miss exams. This can make it nearly impossible for students to recover. A single 0, averaged with an 80, averages to a failing grade of 40. Even an additional 100 only moves the grade to a still-failing 60! Other districts set the floor of their scale at 60. This enables students to receive a failing grade, if appropriate, but it also allows them to recover and pass the course if their effort and grades improve. Another grading policy that can encourage students to work hard to improve is a "B or better" policy. With this policy, the only acceptable grade for major projects, papers, and tests is a B, because research shows that students who receive Bs and As in high school succeed in college. Students redo assignments or retake tests until they achieve a B or better; then the second grade is averaged with their initial grade to produce a final grade.

- **Over-promoting GEDs as an alternative to completing high school.** Too often, a school, district or community can overplay the equivalence of a GED to a high school diploma. It becomes the advisable, easier route when a student is frustrated by a teacher, class or school situation. As noted earlier, a GED and a high school diploma are not equal.

- **Promoting alternative schools to all struggling students.** Alternative schools have an important role to play when they are thoughtfully designed to meet the needs of students who require specific supports or school structures to succeed and provide a clear pathway to high school graduation. Sometimes, however, as with the GED, they can become an easy out for students and schools. Because high schools can send students to alternative schools instead of providing the proper supports themselves, alternative schools can quickly become overwhelmed and suffer from very low graduation rates.

For a better understanding of grading policies, see our chart,

Grading Policies and Practices

Two sets of **state policies** also can seriously affect who drops out and who graduates.

- **School accountability measures.** Some state policies for school improvement put a premium on higher test scores rather than on higher graduation rates. When graduation rates do not count for much in accountability systems, there is an incentive to push students with low achievement levels out of school or to hold them back for several years so they do not have to take any high-stakes tests. There needs to be a better balance of incentives between higher test scores and higher graduation rates. Graduation requirements and curriculum expectations also play a role. As Silent Epidemic shows, students report that low expectations and a lack of confidence in their college-readiness contribute to their dropping out.

- **The legal dropout age.** When the legal dropout age is 16 or 17, students and schools get the message that dropping out is an acceptable, even natural outcome for some students. How can a school tell students they must attend school daily? Why shouldn't some schools actively push out troublesome, challenging, or simply high-need students when they reach the legal dropout age? The good news is that many states are raising the dropout age to 18, coupled with additional supports for struggling students. Resources are available to show your state how to raise the dropout age to 18.

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For a list of legal school-leaving ages by state, see

- **The Education Commission of the States' resource**[16]

For a discussion of attendance policies that have a positive effect, see

- **"Leading to Change/Improving Student Attendance," from the May 2008 issue of *Educational Leadership***[17]

16 http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/64/07/6407.pdf

17 http://www.americaspromise.org/uploadedFiles/AmericasPromiseAlliance/Grad_Nation/Tools/ImprovingAttendance.pdf

For guidance on how other states have raised the legal dropout age, see

- **"The Case for Reform: Raising the Compulsory School Attendance Age"**[18]

Are your high school graduates ready to succeed in college?

Some students report dropping out because they do not believe they will succeed in college even if they do graduate from high school. They assume their high school diploma will not lead to further schooling, so they drop out to find employment as soon as possible rather than waiting until graduation. The fact is, college completion rates for low-income students have remained flat and low even while college enrollments overall have increased over the past 25 years.

Students need clear pathways, not only to move from high school to college, but also to succeed in college.

Although there is no universally agreed-on definition of what "college ready" means, communities can take several steps to gauge their current college readiness and access rates and the likelihood of their high school graduates' success.

- Work with local universities and community colleges to establish the college completion rates of students who graduated from different high schools in your community, as well as the percentage of high school graduates from the community who must take remediation courses during their freshmen year. (Some estimate that 1/3 of all college freshmen need remediation coursework.) Also determine the percentages of graduates from your community's high schools who drop out of college by the end of their freshman or sophomore year.
- Compare your community's course content expectations, assessments, and graduation requirements with national and international standards.

18 http://www.civicenterprises.net/pdfs/raisingschoolage.pdf

Evaluate how your school's curriculum prepares students for college.

Use the checklists and assessments in our:

College- and Career-Ready Curriculum Is a Backbone of School Transformation

Gauge your community's current college readiness and access rates, and the likelihood of your high school graduates' success

. . . through collaboration with local institutions of higher learning.

. . . through comparisons with national and international college readiness standards.

. . . through studies of skills students need to succeed in college.

. . . through studies of factors that affect students' college access.

- Gain an appreciation of the types of skills students need to succeed in four-year colleges, and then survey the faculty of your local high schools regarding the extent to which these skills are not only taught to but demonstrated by students. Read the book *College Knowledge* by David Conley, or even a short article based on the book[19]

- Ask your high school administrators to examine with you the extent to which students in your community have the opportunity to learn not only essential analytical and problem-solving skills but also the "softer skills" of self- and time-management. Read the Consortium on Chicago School Research's reports on college readiness[20]

- Get information on college access and enrollment. Use the U.S. Department of Education's College Navigator database to research postsecondary institutions' location, type, programs, and majors, and resources relating to financial aid, career exploration, and preparation for the college application process[21]

- Survey your seniors to see whether they report experiencing the level of independent work required to succeed in college. Use as a resource and compare with the results of the Indiana University national student surveys of high school, community college, and four-year college students. For two summaries of the survey's results, see:

  "What Student Engagement Data Tell Us About College Readiness"[22]

  "Voices of Students on Engagement" (from the 2006 High School Survey of Student Engagement)[23]

. . . through a survey of your schools' seniors.

19 http://www.s4s.org/upload/Principal%20Leadership%20article%209-05.pdf
20 http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publications.php
21 https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator
22 http://www.aacu.org/peerreview/pr-wi07/pr-wi07_analysis1.cfm
23 http://ceep.indiana.edu/hssse/pdf/HSSSE_2006_Report.pdf

- Survey graduates' views. Graduates also can offer a unique perspective on their preparedness for postsecondary education, work, and life. By probing how well prepared they felt for postsecondary coursework, job applications, expectations in the workplace, basic acts of citizen engagement such as voting, and their own financial literacy, a community can better understand whether the education it currently provides is satisfactory.

. . . through a survey of your schools' graduates.

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Resources for determining college-readiness include:

- **The American Diploma Project of Achieve, Inc.**
  Detailed college-readiness standards for high school graduates, by subject area, accompanied by grade-band comparison levels for students in the lower grades[24]
- **College Board**
  A not-for-profit membership association, composed of more than 5,400 schools, colleges, universities, and other educational organizations, that connects students to college success and opportunity. Its website has resources for students, parents, and professionals[25]
- **ACT**
  Detailed college readiness levels for middle and high school grades showing the quality of work that is likely to lead to college success *(National Curriculum Survey 2005-2006)*[26]
- **The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) through the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)**
  Comparisons of 15-year-olds' problem-solving and thinking skills in more than 30 developed and undeveloped countries around the globe against a clear set of international standards[27]

A resource for communities to determine if and where their students have enrolled in college and whether they matriculate:

- **National Student Clearinghouse**[28]

24 http://www.achieve.org
25 http:/www.collegeboard.com
26 http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/NationalCurriculumSurvey2006.pdf
27 http://www.oecd.org
28 http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/

III. Solutions for Comprehensively Addressing Your Community's Dropout Crisis

The dropout crisis in your community will not be solved through a single policy change, a new dropout prevention program, an expanded investment in pre-k or quality after-school programs, or a state of the art school reform model. The dropout crisis in your community will only be solved through thoughtful weaving of multiple school improvements, enhancements to student supports in and out of school, and policy changes. All of these measures will need to be fueled by the necessary resource allocations, effectively targeted at the students in need, and guided by a measurement system that lets you know what's working and what's not.

Here is how to use this section:

If you're ready to develop a set of coordinated improvements that work together, go to

Developing a comprehensive set of solutions

Although the specifics of your community's solutions may be unique, in most cases they will need to involve a number of important initiatives.

If you need to learn about school transformation — whole-school reform and/or new school creation — go to

Creating school transformation

If you need to develop a system of student supports, in and out of school, go to

Developing comprehensive student supports

If you need to improve college- and career-readiness of your graduates, go to

Improving college and career readiness

If you need to create a comprehensive, multi-level dropout prevention and recovery system, including effective early warning systems, go to

Developing dropout prevention and recovery systems

If you need to ensure that policies and resource allocations promote high school graduation and college and career readiness, go to

Ensuring effective policies and resource allocations

Developing a comprehensive set of solutions

While your solution strategy ultimately must reflect the specific and unique dropout challenges your community faces, you can refer to established models to get your work started.

Silent Epidemic model[1]

In 2007, more than 100 organizations representing educators and community members endorsed this 10-Point Plan to Address America's Silent Epidemic:

1. Support accurate graduation and dropout data.

2. Establish early-warning systems to support struggling students.

3. Provide adult advocates and student supports.

4. Support parental engagement and individualized graduation plans.

5. Establish a rigorous college- and work-preparedness curriculum for high schools.

6. Provide supportive options for struggling students to meet rigorous expectations.

7. Raise compulsory school age requirements under state laws.

8. Expand college-level learning environments in high schools.

9. Focus the research and disseminate best practices.

10. Make increasing graduation and college/workforce preparedness a national priority.

1 http://www.silentepidemic.org/solutions/index.htm

Develop a comprehensive action plan.

Share the Silent Epidemic 10-point plan

and

National Education Association Plan with your community to stimulate thought about the set of solutions which will be required locally to end the dropout crisis.

The National Education Association model[2]

The National Education Association's 12-Point Plan for Reducing the School Dropout Crisis recommends a very similar approach:

1. Mandate high school graduation or equivalency as compulsory for everyone before the age of 21.

2. Establish high school graduation centers for students aged 19–21.

3. Make sure students receive individualized attention.

4. Expand students' graduation options.

5. Increase career education and workforce readiness programs in schools.

6. Act early so students do not depart from school.

7. Involve families in learning at school and at home.

8. Monitor students' academic progress in school.

9. Monitor, accurately report, and work to reduce dropout rates.

10. Involve the entire community in dropout prevention.

11. Make sure educators have the training and resources they need to prevent students from dropping out.

12. Make high school graduation a federal priority.

2 http://www.nea.org/presscenter/actionplan1.html

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For additional models and tools see:

- **Everyone Graduates Center, Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University**[3]
  The Center's goal is to help develop and provide the know-how required for all students to graduate from high school prepared for college, career, and life. Its comprehensive approach includes tools and models to keep all students on the path to high school graduation, along with efforts that increase the ability of states, communities, school districts, and schools to provide students with the supports they need to succeed.

- **National Action Strategies of the America's Promise Alliance**[4]
  This Alliance of more than 230 national organizations — businesses, nonprofits, education groups, faith-based and civic organizations, and more — supports three high-level strategies for giving wraparound supports to all young people:
  1. *Where the Kids Are.* Combined, year-round school and community services for at-risk children, using schools as hubs
  2. *Ready for the Real World.* Service learning and career exploration for middle school students through relevant real-world experiences
  3. *All Kids Covered:* Working toward enrollment of all eligible children in SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program) and Medicaid programs

- **American Diploma Project**[5]
  Through this project, governors, state superintendents of education, business executives, and college leaders work to raise high school standards, and make assessments and curricula more demanding so they are in line with postsecondary education and work. The American Diploma Project Network now includes 33 states that are dedicated to ensuring that all students graduate ready for success in college or work.

3 http://www.every1graduates.org

4 http://www.americaspromise.org/APAPage.aspx?id=6530

5 http://www.achieve.org

Creating school transformation

Students drop out of schools, not districts, communities, or states. To end your community's dropout crisis, the elementary, middle, and/or high schools in which large percentages of students are falling off the path to high school graduation will need to be transformed.

This will likely require some combination of comprehensive whole school reform and new school creation. Base your decisions on how to proceed not only on the information you have collected, but also on the resources and strengths of your community and the number of schools it needs to transform.

Comprehensive whole-school reform

This strategy involves:

- **Organizational and structural reforms that make middle and high school more personalized.** Students benefit from experiences that demonstrate the connection between school and their future goals, and from efforts that promote student involvement, active learning, and adult support for a manageable number of students.
- **Instructional, curricular, and assessment reforms** — backed by sufficient and appropriate extra help — that enable all students to succeed in college and workplace preparation classes, and that reflect a connection to real-world activities.
- **Leadership reforms** that distribute key leadership responsibilities to multiple adults in the school and rethink staff and administrator responsibilities. These reforms make it possible to maintain a focus on continual improvement in teaching and student learning.
- **Professional development reforms** that provide for job-based learning, content learning opportunities, and peer support.

Review key elements of a comprehensive solution strategy for your community.

See the tool

Comprehensive Community Solutions Diagram

Prioritize elements of your action plan.

Use as a guide:

Comprehensive Community Solutions–Taking Inventory of What Is, Overall

Comprehensive Community Solutions–Taking Inventory of the parts
Sample Inventory: Overview of Student Support

and

- **Use of data** to support ongoing analysis, identify successes and areas needing improvement, and encourage collaborative problem solving.
- **Parent and community involvement.**

A DEEPER LOOK

To learn more about comprehensive whole-school reform at the middle and high school level, see:

- **The National High School Alliance's *A Call to Action: Transforming High School for All Youth*[6]**
  Contains six core reform principles endorsed by the majority of organizations active in high school reform as well as a rich set of web-based tools to support their implementation.
- **The National High School Center[7]**
  Provides access to a host of research briefs that outline current best practices in high school reform.
- **Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Education[8]**
  Provides similar tools for the middle grades.
- **National Middle School Association[9]**
  Also focuses on reforms for the middle grades.
- **The National Association of Secondary School Principals' *Breaking Ranks II and High School Reform and Breaking Ranks in the Middle*[10]**
  Field guides geared to secondary school principals and their leadership teams. Designed to improve the learning experience of every student, the guides identify areas in which to begin reform and strategies for implementing successful reform. They also provide profiles of successes, challenges, and results of implementation.
- ***Emerging Evidence on Improving High School Achievement and Graduation Rates*[11]**
  Examines well-recognized comprehensive improvement initiatives, including career academies and Talent Development high schools. These interventions in 16 districts offer findings on both the nature of the problems and the effectiveness of the interventions.

6 http://www.hsalliance.org
7 http://www.betterhighschools.org
8 http://www.mgforum.org/Improvingschools/CSR/csr_intro.htm
9 http://www.nmsa.org
10 http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/sec_inside.asp?CID=563&DID=48223.
11 http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_EmergingEvidenceBrief_111606Final.pdf

- ***Meeting Five Critical Challenges of High School Reform***[12]
  Examines three leading comprehensive school reform models that serve low-performing high schools and have demonstrated a positive impact on struggling students. Intensive features of each model include an emphasis on adult advocates (First Things First); accelerated curriculum and team teaching to help students who enter high school two or more years below grade level regain lost ground and move forward (Talent Development); and links to the workplace (Career Academies).
- **The Mass Insight Education & Research Institute's *The Turnaround Challenge***[13]
  Has a number of valuable resources that examine why school turnaround founded on the best research has not yet reached potential at large scale, and what major new thinking and fundamental policy and strategy changes will lead to heightened outcomes. The Turnaround Challenge and associated PowerPoint provide thoughtful examination of "what works" in high-poverty high-performing schools. Mass Insight proposes a five-point plan for creating new state and local partnerships to drive improvement.
- **The What Works Clearinghouse**[14]
  Established in 2002 by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, is a trusted source of scientific evidence of what works in education. Its easily accessible databases and user-friendly reports promote informed education decision-making by offering reviews of programs, products, practices, and policies that can be adapted by individual communities. It includes a separate section on dropout prevention.

There is emerging evidence that experiential learning activities provide students with additional avenues to experience success and compelling reasons to come to school.

To learn about their role in school reform, see:

- ***Engaged for Success: Service-Learning as a Tool for High School Dropout Prevention***[15]
  Provides evidence of the power of service-learning, an educational technique that combines classroom learning with community service to keep at-risk students attending school and more engaged in the classroom.
- **The America's Promise Alliance national action strategy, *Ready for the Real World***[16]
  Focuses on engaging middle school-age youth in experiential activities, such as service-learning and career exploration, to help them connect their school success to

12 http://www.mdrc.org/publications/428/overview.html

13 http://www.massinsight.org/resourcefiles/TheTurnaroundChallenge_2007.pdf

14 http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/topic.aspx?tid=06

15 http://www.civicenterprises.net/pdfs/service-learning.pdf

16 http://www.americaspromise.org/APAPage.aspx?id=6546

their future plans. With research showing that many students drop out around the 9th and 10th grades, the Alliance is committed to building in- and out-of-school, real-world opportunities for all middle schoolers to help them make a successful transition to high school, and, ultimately, to graduate ready for the real world.

- **National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship**[17]
  For career exploration and entrepreneurship activities in middle and high school.
- **National Association for Urban Debate Leagues**[18]
  For debate programs

New school creation

New school creation is increasingly being used as a means to provide more supportive and challenging environments to students who are at risk for not graduating from traditional high schools and to transform or replace low performing high schools.

Key elements of new schools created for these purposes include:

- Smaller size — many range from 300 to 500 students
- Student choice — students typically choose to attend the schools rather than being assigned to it based on where they live
- Thematic focus — the schools often but not always are built around a particular theme to link learning to the wider world
- Focus on college preparation — most but not all are designed to serve as pathways to college for all students attending the school.
- Greater autonomy — the schools sometimes are run by external operators, both national and local, in partnership with the school district. Generally, in return for meeting performance benchmarks, the schools are given latitude

17 http://www.nfte.com
18 http://www.urbandebate.org

to design their own instructional programs, professional development, and organizational structures, e.g. school schedule, length of day, etc.

- Principals and teachers recruited to the mission of the school — many new schools start by adding one grade at a time, which enables them to build a cadre of teachers who share a common mission

New school creation, as with comprehensive whole school reform, has its successes, challenges, trade-offs, and pitfalls. It will help your community to learn from the communities that have experienced all of these, including Boston's Pilot Schools, the New Century High School Effort in New York City, Renaissance 2010 in Chicago, Baltimore's Innovation High School and Transformation 6-12 School efforts, and North Carolina's New School Project.

A DEEPER LOOK

To learn more about other communities' efforts to create new schools, see:

- **New Visions for Public Schools (NYC)**[19]
- **Renaissance 2010 (Chicago)**[20]
- **North Carolina New School Project**[21]

To read some recent evaluations of new schools, see:

- **West Ed's Rethinking High Schools series**[22]
- **Urban Institute's evaluation of Baltimore's Innovation High Schools**[23]

19 http://www.newvisions.org
20 http://www.ren2010.cps.k12.il.us
21 http://newschoolsproject.org/page.php
22 http://www.wested.org/cs/we/view/rs/830
23 http://www.urban.org/publications/411590.html

Developing comprehensive student supports

To succeed in and stay connected with school, some students will need extra supports in and out of school.

These supports will include a combination of wraparound services; mentors; tutors; adult advocates; enhanced parental involvement; and quality after-school, Saturday, and summer programs. These supports not only need to be available, they also need to be coordinated with each other and linked with the student's school experience.

There must also be enough support providers with sufficient capacity so every student can obtain the adult and peer guidance needed to graduate, prepared for college, work, and life.

To meet this goal, you will want to:

- develop a comprehensive system
- increase the number of skilled and committed adults who provide student supports
- increase parental involvement
- launch and maintain a communitywide campaign to improve all students' attendance

Components of a comprehensive system

The areas where research and experience indicate many students may need additional adult support are:

School achievement

- Academic skills (developing core reading, writing, and mathematics skills)
- Course performance (doing quality course work, completing assignments, doing well on tests, etc.)

School engagement

- Attendance (coming every day)
- Behavior (conforming to the expected norms of behavior)
- Effort (trying hard, participating in learning, not giving up)

Life outside of school

- Health supports for students and their families
- Child care (so older students do not miss school to provide emergency or fall-back child care to younger siblings)
- Homelessness
- Foster care

The America's Promise Alliance has developed a *Five Promises* framework that can help you evaluate and prioritize work for ensuring students' access to comprehensive wraparound supports, in and out of school. The *Five Promises* are:

1. **Caring adults** who are actively involved as parents, teachers, mentors, coaches, and neighbors

2. **Safe places** that offer constructive use of time

3. **A healthy start** and healthy development

4. **Effective education** that builds marketable skills

5. **Opportunities to help others** by making a difference through service

Develop a plan for creating comprehensive student supports.

As young people experience more of these Promises in their homes, schools, and communities, positive behaviors increase and more students stay on the path to high school graduation.

Yet, the Alliance's *Every Child, Every Promise* research, released in 2006, shows that two-thirds of school-age young people report having fewer than four of these five critical supports. Worse yet, 20 percent reported having one or none.

In some secondary schools that serve high-poverty populations, hundreds of students will require extra support. These challenges only emphasize the need to keep the *Five Promises* and provide America's students with wraparound, non-educational supports that are so essential for school success.

Develop a systematic approach for delivering supports.

A DEEPER LOOK

To learn more about creating a comprehensive student support system, see:

- **Communities In Schools (CIS)**[24]
  Uses research- based dropout prevention strategies and connects community resources with schools to help young people learn, stay in school, and prepare for life. Each year, more than 2 million young people in 27 states and the District of Columbia have access to integrated student support services through CIS.

To learn more about health supports for students and their families, see:

- **The America's Promise Alliance national action strategy, *All Kids Covered***[25]
  Focuses on enrolling the estimated 6.5 million+ young people who are eligible but not yet enrolled for publicly supported health insurance programs, such as the State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and Medicaid. Students' and their families' health can have a serious impact on educational success, and having health insurance is the first step to accessing quality care.

For the complete *Every Child, Every Promise* research report, see:

- **America's Promise Alliance report**[26]

24 http://www.cisnet.org

25 http://www.americaspromise.org/APAPage.aspx?id=6524

26 http://www.americaspromise.org/APAPage.aspx?id=6584

Increase the number of skilled and committed adults who provide student supports

People in your community can provide schools with a wide range of services and assistance vital to struggling students, including attendance monitoring, school and peer counseling, mentoring, tutoring, internships, service learning, summer school programs, after-school programs, and more. These adults become students' advocates — champions who can spot students' academic and personal challenges early and get them the support they need.

Adults providing student supports can take many forms and can be located in schools or the community, and sponsored by faith-based organizations, corporations and federations of local businesses, nonprofit initiatives, colleges and universities, school districts, and others.

There is also a growing number of student support organizations with national reach and solid evidence of success on which your community can call to provide essential student supports. Many of these organizations may already be in your community, such as:

After-School Programs

- The Boys & Girls Clubs of America, in partnership with leading local foundations and corporations, sponsors after-school programs in thousands of professionally staffed locations across the country. These programs help youth create goals for their future and provide opportunities for exploring career possibilities; supplementing their school learning; and developing personal, technical, and digital literacy skills for a more productive life.[27]

National Service

- City Year is a national service organization that sends teams of 17- to 24-year-olds into schools in 17 of the nation's largest cities to provide daily student

Reach out to parents, organizations, business-people, college students and other community members to serve as advocates and mentors.

27 http://www.bgca.org

supports before, during, and after school. Its Whole School, Whole Student program supports a positive school climate and provides academic supports, including mentoring, community service, and after-school programs.[28]

- Experience Corps is a national service organization that places teams of older adults (55+) in schools to provide tutoring and student supports. A recent evaluation has shown significant impacts on reading scores and suspension rates in elementary schools.[29]

Summer Learning

- The Center for Summer Learning, based at Johns Hopkins University, works through a national network of providers and partners to make access to high-quality, research-based summer learning a priority in communities across the country. This is especially important since more than half of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities.[30]

A DEEPER LOOK

To learn more about the role of adult advocacy, see:

- ***Why Adult Advocates Matter***[31]
  A summary of the most recent, relevant research literature that concludes that all children need an adult advocate, especially as they make critical life decisions such as whether to stay in school. In particular, see pages 17-22 of this dropout prevention resource from the Institute of Education Sciences.
- **Big Brothers Big Sisters of America**[32]
  The largest and one of the best-known national mentoring organizations, found in its recent study that mentored students were 52 percent less likely to skip school, 46 percent less likely to begin using illegal drugs, and more likely to get along with their families and peers.

28 http://www.cityyear.org
29 http://www.experiencecorps.org
30 http://www.summerlearning.org
31 http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/dp_pg_090308.pdf
32 http://www.bbbs.org/site/c.diJKKYPLJvH/b.1632631/k.3195/Our_Impact.htm

To learn about a new way that advocates and mentors can help, see:

- **Personal Learning Plans**[33]
  Supported by the nation's secondary school principals via the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). NASSP recommends that each student should have a personal plan for improvement. Plans are based on individual needs, and, as much as possible, are designed by students themselves to meet their own high standards and personal path to graduation. Plans are developed and reviewed frequently with adults. Students see the steps they must take to realize their plan and know there are adults to help them meet their goals. Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform.

Increase parental involvement

Research shows that when parents are involved in their children's school lives, attendance, educational performance, classroom behavior, and emotional well-being improve. Parents' involvement also benefits schools. It boosts the morale of teachers and administrators who know they are backed up by parents, and that parents support the mission of the school and understand their joint role with teachers in supporting student performance, behaviors, and efforts to succeed.

New research shows that parents with students attending low-performing schools understand better than others that parental involvement is essential to their children's academic success. This represents a significant opportunity for schools that want to get parents involved.

Make a special effort to reach parents.

A DEEPER LOOK

To learn more about the importance of parent involvement, see:

- ***One Dream, Two Realities: Perspectives of Parents on America's High School***[34]
  This report shares the perspectives of parents of students in high-performing and low-performing high schools and shows that parents with less education, lower incomes and children in low-performing schools are the most likely to see a rigorous education and their own involvement critical to their child's success. The report provides specific strategies for the engagement of parents.

33 http://www.nassp.org

34 http://www.civicenterprises.net/pdfs/onedream.pdf

- **"Parent Involvement"**[35]
  A study that looks at research into parent involvement, especially as it affects the middle school years and transition into high school. Parents' involvement is especially important during these years to spot early warning signs of dropping out and preventing it.
- **The National Network of Partnership Schools, Johns Hopkins University**[36]
  A long-established, research-based university-district-school and community collaborative whose work with more than 1,000 schools focuses on building programs that enhance parents' involvement in their children's education and outcomes. Its website is a rich source of case studies and best practices for all levels of schooling.

Launch and maintain a communitywide campaign to improve all students' attendance

Develop a coordinated, broad-based strategy to address absenteeism.

One of the key roles communities can play is to organize a communitywide effort to ensure that all students are able to and do attend school regularly. Most communities with a significant dropout problem also find that large numbers of their students are chronically absent, missing 20 or more days of school per year.

Although students must be present and engage to learn, thousands of this country's youngest students are academically at-risk because of extended absences when they first embark upon their school careers. An applied research project supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (See "A Deeper Look") has found that, nationally, an estimated one in ten kindergarten and first grade students are chronically absent (i.e. miss nearly a month or more of school over the course of a year including excused and unexcused absences). Absenteeism can reach even higher levels in particular schools and districts. Chronic early absence in kindergarten is associated with lower first grade academic performance for all children and the worst fifth grade academic achievement among poor children. The good news is that chronic early absence can be significantly reduced when schools, communities and families join together to monitor and promote attendance,

35 http://www.nmsa.org/portals/0/pdf/research/Research_Summaries/Parent_Involvement.pdf
36 http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000

as well as to identify and address the factors that prevent young students from attending school every day.

In some middle and high schools that serve high-poverty populations, half or more of students are chronically absent, and a quarter or more of students can cumulatively miss a full year of schooling or more between the 6th and 10th grades.

A DEEPER LOOK

To read the full report, see:

- ***Present, Engaged and Accounted for: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades***[37]

For more information on absenteeism and combating it, see:

- **The Baltimore Education Research Consortium**[38]
  Highlights the magnitude of chronic absenteeism in one large urban district, and also provides key questions communities should ask to get every student to attend school every day.
- **The National Center for School Engagement**[39]
  Analysis of state and district policies, research-based best practices and recommendations relevant to combating chronic absenteeism as well as engaging students with very poor attendance. Effective truancy policies appear to be those that combine intensive, personalized attention and support with multiple, often coordinated community-agency strategies for getting students back on track and attending school daily. The evidence is good that truant students can be reconnected to education when the right combinations of strategies are used.

37 http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_837.html

38 http://www.baltimore-berc.org/pdfs/Attendance_issue_brief_05-13-08.pdf

39 http://www.schoolengagement.org

Improving college and career readiness

To make all your community's efforts worthwhile, it is necessary to ensure that a high school diploma means something. A diploma needs to signal that the high school graduates in your community are prepared for college, career, and civic life. As a result, an essential element of your community's comprehensive set of solutions to the dropout crisis must be ensuring that your high school graduates are college and career ready.

Provide a rigorous college and work preparatory curriculum for all secondary school students

Students taking a challenging core curriculum in high school are better prepared to succeed in college and in the workforce than are students taking less demanding coursework. States and schools need to have high standards for all students and tie high school graduation requirements to the expectations of colleges and employers.

It is important to distinguish rigor from simply difficult or numerous assignments. To engage and prepare students for adult success, high school coursework needs to develop minds and ignite interests. Curricula must develop advanced thinking skills and the ability to apply knowledge to real-world situations.

There is emerging evidence that the same underlying academic skills that are needed for success in college are also needed for success in the workplace. Attending a four-year college, while it should be a real option for all students, is not the only pathway to adult success. There are many rewarding and productive occupations that require two years of postsecondary schooling or training. High schools can build direct linkages for students to these options through high-quality career and technical education programs (CTE), career academies, and dual-enrollment programs within community colleges.

Reform district-wide curricula so education is more challenging and prepares students for success beyond high school.

A DEEPER LOOK

For a further examination of college readiness and college requirements, see:

Reports by Achieve, Inc., and the American Diploma Project:

- ***Aligning High School Graduation Requirements with the Real World***[40]
- ***Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts***[41]
- ***Closing the Expectations Gap 2008***[42]

ACT Publications that reveal characteristics of high school courses that successfully prepare low-income and minority students for success in college:

- ***Ready to Succeed: All Students Prepared for College and Work***[43]
- ***On Course for Success: A Close Look at Selected High School Courses That Prepare All Students for College and Work (published in partnership with the Education Trust)***[44]

Other resources include:

- **David Conley's College Readiness Paper**[45]
- **College Summit**[46]
  A nonprofit organization that has served more than 35,000 students to date. It provides districts with a strategy and tools to send more students to postsecondary education.

For more information on Career Academies, see:

- ***Long Term Impacts on Labor Market Outcomes, Educational Attainment and Transition***[47]
  Highlights the value of Career Academies in boosting earnings among young men and increasing the percentage of young people living independently with children and a spouse or partner.

40 http://www.achieve.org/node/980
41 http://www.achieve.org/node/552
42 http://www.achieve.org/node/990
43 http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/ready_to_succeed.pdf
44 http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/success_report.pdf
45 http://www.gatesfoundation.org/learning/Documents/CollegeReadinessPaper.pdf
46 http://www.collegesummit.org
47 http://www.mdrc.org/publications/482/overview.html

- **The Career Academy Support Network**[48]

and

- **The National Academy Foundation**[49]

Expand college-level learning opportunities in high school

Dual-enrollment (in high school and college), early college, and Advanced Placement (AP) programs allow high school students to earn credit toward high school and college simultaneously. They also provide high school students direct experience with college expectations and workloads, easing their transition to college. Dual-enrollment is a well-established practice in which advanced high school students, usually seniors, take one or two courses at nearby colleges, usually two-year community colleges. Early college high schools blend high school and college in a rigorous yet supportive program, so a student can earn a high school diploma and complete the first two years of college in five years instead of six.

A DEEPER LOOK

To learn more about dual-enrollment, see:

- ***On Ramp to College: A State Policymaker's Guide to Dual Enrollment***[50]
  An examination of policies and practices that shape current dual-enrollment programs. It also defines principles that characterize the best of these programs, and provides a tool for assessing and improving dual-enrollment programs.

For models of aligning high school curriculum with postsecondary coursework, see:

- ***Early College High Schools***[51]
  Describes the redesign of almost 160 schools in 24 states to align high school

48 http://casn.berkeley.edu
49 http://www.naf.org
50 http://www.jff.org/Documents/OnRamp.pdf
51 http://www.earlycolleges.org

curricula better with postsecondary coursework, so students are prepared to make a successful transition from high school to college.

To learn more about early college programs, see:

- ***The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Overview of the Early College Model***[52]
  Tracks how the early college model has grown, and provides facts and figures from recent evaluations and snapshots of early college high schools across the country.
- **The North Carolina New Schools Project**[53]
  Provides guidelines and development strategies for creating a statewide network of Learn and Earn early college high schools linked to community colleges serving every region of the state.

Provide supports for students to meet high expectations and make the transition from high school to college and career

Because student learning needs and styles differ widely, communities should develop a range of supports and school redesign options that allow all students to graduate from high school prepared for college and the workplace.

For models see:

Rethinking High School, which profiles five reform programs funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that are successfully preparing ethnically and socio-economically diverse students to be college-ready. All of these successful programs are helping students from low-income and under-serving communities see college as an attainable goal; strengthening academic programs with full access to rigorous, college preparatory curriculum; ensuring an interrelated, fully detailed curriculum from middle grades through high school; providing extra academic and social supports during students' critical freshman year; and drawing out-of-school youth back into the classroom.[54]

52 http://www.gatesfoundation.org/learning/Documents/ECHSI_Evaluation_2003-07.pdf

53 http://newschoolsproject.org/page.php?p=3.2

54 http:/www.wested.org/online_pubs/gf-07-02.pdf

A DEEPER LOOK

For more information on the types of supports many students will need to succeed in college level work while in high school, see:

- ***Jobs for the Future –Minding the Gap: Why Integrating High School with College Makes Sense and How to Do It***[55]
- **Leveraging Postsecondary Partners to Build a College-Going Culture: Tools for High School/ Postsecondary Partnerships**[56]
- **Visit the College Board website**[57]

Developing dropout prevention and recovery systems

Your community will need a way to identify and support students at the moment they begin to fall off the path to high school graduation. Most eventual dropouts send distress signals years before they drop out, providing ample time to provide them the supports they need to graduate.

Your community will also need to recognize, however, that even with increased dropout prevention efforts some students will still fall deeply off track or even drop out. As a result, multiple pathways to high school graduation need to be built and strong dropout recovery strategies employed.

Develop a cross-grade, district-wide dropout prevention system

Establish early warning systems

A widely held, common misconception is that dropping out of high school is an unpredictable reaction to a life event or a series of mysterious, poor decisions by a student. Instead, research suggests that students send distress signals years before

55 http://www.jff.org/KnowledgeCenter/Minding+the+Gap%3A+Why+Integrating+High+School+with+College+Makes+Sense+and+How+to+Do+It.html

56 http://www.jff.org/Documents/ToolsPSEpshipslowres.pdf

57 http://www.collegeboard.com

dropping out. Most students who drop out follow identifiable patterns of failing grades and poor attendance.

Because of this, educators have developed "on-track and off-track indicators" that identify a student who is at risk of dropping out long before the student makes that choice. The indicators are as simple as grades and attendance. High schools and middle schools need to develop these early warning systems to identify students who are in need of extra academic or other supports.

With that information, districts, schools, and parents can intervene to get students back on track and increase their chances of graduating.

For some students, dropping out can be traced to experiences at the start of elementary school. Existing research indicates three areas that communities should check:

- early chronic absenteeism — how many students are missing a month or more of school in K–3
- acquiring basic reading skills — how many students enter 3rd grade without strong reading skills
- positive school experiences — how many students are having serious behavioral problems in K–3.

It is during the middle grades and the first two years of high school, however, when we can identify the majority of students who — without sustained intervention — will likely not graduate. During these years it is particularly important to pay attention to the A, B, C's of dropout prevention—attendance, behavior, and course performance.

- **A**ttendance — 6th to 10th graders who miss 10 or more, 20 or more, and 40 or more days of school are sending increasingly loud distress signals.
- **B**ehavior — middle grade and high school students who get suspended need support to stay on track to graduation, but so do students who consistently

Know the early ABC indicators that a student is off track and at risk of dropping out.

demonstrate mild misbehaviors or lack of effort, e.g. not completing assignments, not paying attention, acting out of place in the classroom.

- Course Performance — middle and high school students who receive an F, particularly in mathematics or English, or two or more F's in any course are falling off the graduation path. D's and very low GPA's are also cause for concern. Overall, course performance is much more predictive than test scores of a student's graduation odds.

plus

- Earned On-Time Grade Promotion/Significantly Over-Age for Grade — adolescents who do not meet the requirements to be promoted to the next grade (and as a result become significantly over-age for their grade) will likely not graduate unless they receive sustained supports. Many will need innovative educational options tailored to their unique circumstances. Communities need to reduce the number of over-age students by effectively responding to the first signs of student distress.

A DEEPER LOOK

For more information on early warning systems, see:

- ***Approaches to Dropout Prevention: Heeding Early Warning Signs with Appropriate Interventions***[58]
  Outlines four key indicators that are key predictors of future dropouts: poor grades in core subjects, low attendance, failure to be promoted to the next grade, and disengagement in the classroom including behavioral problems.
- ***Three Steps to Building an Early Warning and Intervention System for Potential Dropouts***[59]
  From the Everyone Graduates Center, an overview of the research literature related to early warning systems, indicators, and successful interventions.

58 http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_ApproachestoDropoutPrevention.pdf
59 http://www.every1graduates.org/PDFs/Three_Steps.pdf

Institute early warning systems that detect a student is at risk of dropping out and poor grades;

To get your system started, use the chart:

Key Data for An "Early Warning System" with On- And Off-Track Indicators

For more information about on-track indicators for high school students, see:

- **The Consortium on Chicago School Research**[60]

For information on solutions to elementary school behavior indicators, see:

- ***Foundation for Childhood Development Briefing***[61]

Create a multi-tiered response system

To be effective, early warning indicators need to be linked to prevention, intervention, and recovery responses. For each student behavior that signals a student is falling off track — attendance, behavior, and course performance — there needs to be:

- school-wide prevention strategies
- targeted moderate-intensity supports aimed at small groups of students who need additional help
- intensive, case-managed responses when neither whole school prevention nor targeted responses are enough.

A tiered response triggered by an early warning system increases the likelihood that effective responses will reach students consistently. It can also enable the integration of school programs, wraparound services, and out-of-school supports in a clear and systematic way so that the right intervention gets to the right student at the right time with the required intensity.

The National Center for School Engagement provides this successful case study of the case management approach: Josh was a 15 year old Caucasian male and 10th grader, referred to the Juvenile Intervention Services Truancy (or JIST) Program through the Johnson County District Attorney's office. While in a group home his grades and attendance improved, but soon after he returned

Develop a response system that includes school-wide prevention strategies, moderately intensive supports for students who need extra help, and intensive case-managed responses for students most at risk of dropping out.

60 http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/index.php

61 http://ziglercenter.yale.edu/documents/PreKExpulsionBrief2.pdf

home, truancy became an issue. The JIST caseworker discovered three main issues that led to Josh's truancy: alcohol and drug abuse by Josh and other family members, domestic violence, and negative sibling role models who are delinquent themselves. During the 12-week program, Josh, guided by his caseworker, began to focus on his individual strengths and how to keep from returning to custody. He set goals for himself in the areas of Education, Socialization, Identity, Affection, Health and Economic Situation. While in the program, Josh's school attendance dramatically improved, as did his grades. On his last progress report, he earned all A's and has not missed a single day of school this year.

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To learn more about a multi-level approach, see:

- ***What Your Community Can Do to End Its Drop-Out Crisis***[62]

To read more examples of successful case management interventions, see:

- **Publications of the National Center for School Engagement**[63]

Provide multiple pathways to success and alternative recovery options for older youth

Even with a highly effective dropout prevention and intervention system, some students will fall off track and need recovery options and alternative pathways to success. When developing a dropout recovery strategy for your community, you'll find that one solution does not fit all students. Multiple programs and interventions must operate simultaneously to address the most students.

The goal is to provide a second chance for students who have left high school without a diploma and for secondary students who are significantly over-age and far from meeting the requirements of a high school diploma.

Develop services that bring dropouts back to education.

62 http://www.every1graduates.org/PDFs/WhatYourCommunityCanDo.pdf

63 http://www.schoolengagement.org

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For sample recovery strategies, see:

- ***The Dropout Crisis: Promising Approaches in Prevention and Recovery***[64]
  From Jobs for the Future, examines strategies for communities to prevent and recover late high school dropouts. It looks at current practices, highlighting those successful in reducing perpetually high dropout rates and more systematic approaches.
- ***Disconnected Youth: Federal Action Could Address Some of the Challenges Faced by Local Programs that Reconnect Youth to Education and Employment***[65]
  From the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), identifies 39 solid programs that share a set of common program characteristics for reconnecting older youth to the education and employment pipeline.
- **The Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation**[66]
  New York City Public Schools' response, provides targeted solutions to nearly 70,000 under-credited older students who may be truant, thinking about dropping out, or seeking additional educational options. These carefully designed alternative settings have increased the likelihood of these students graduating from 20 percent to 44–69 percent. Lessons learned from New York City Public Schools may not be directly transferable; that system serves 1.1 million students. But solutions can be adapted and scaled to smaller school systems.
- **YouthBuild programs**[67]
  Involve collaboration among different community sectors. Low-income young people ages 16–24 work simultaneously toward their GED or high school diploma, learn job skills, and serve their communities by building affordable housing.
- **Chicago Public Schools**[68]
  Has developed an elementary and secondary graduation pathways strategy. Elementary students are evaluated for risk factors such as age, attendance, test scores and grades; late middle school students and 9th graders are evaluated in terms of high numbers of absences, early failures, and other "off-track" indicators; and older students are identified as being "off pace to graduate" based on their credit accumulation and age. Prevention and early intervention strategies are implemented initially, followed later by credit-recovery efforts and, for older students, alternative reenrollment options. Office of Graduation Pathways, Office of High School Programs.

64 http://www.jff.org/Documents/dropoutcrisis.pdf
65 http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d08313.pdf
66 http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/OMPG/default.htm
67 http://www.youthbuild.org
68 http://www.cps.k12.il.us/OHSP

Ensuring effective policies and resource allocations

Policies at the local, state, and federal level can help or hinder communities in their efforts to graduate all their students prepared for adult success. The same is true for how resources are allocated. Communities need to work together at the local level to shape effective policies and resource allocations, while advocating for them at the state and federal level.

Support policies that promote accurate graduation and dropout data.

Schools and communities cannot address the dropout problem adequately without accurate data. The National Governors Association established a 50-state compact that provides a common definition for high school graduation rates, and the U.S. Department of Education is requiring a common calculation of graduation rates based on this agreement. These rates, and the data systems for collecting and publishing graduation and dropout rates, should be made available at the district and school levels, and data should be categorized by gender, racial, and ethnic subgroups. States and school districts should set benchmarks for raising graduation rates and should monitor progress toward such goals.

Support policies to raise compulsory school age requirements under state laws.

Governors and state legislators are increasingly interested in raising the compulsory school attendance age under state law from 16 or 17 to 18 years old, and providing support for struggling students. Many states recognize that current laws were passed 100 years ago, when life in the United States and our economy were very different.

Work for policies at the district, state, and national levels that encourage graduation and college/career preparation and work against policies that inadvertently discourage success

Research shows that one in four potential dropouts stays in school simply because of the compulsory school age law. The compulsory school age has been raised to 18 years of age in 20 states across the country — from California and Hawaii to Indiana and Louisiana to New Hampshire and Rhode Island. Twenty-two states attempted to raise the compulsory school age during the 2007 legislative season, and such legislation passed in three of those states. Legislation is now pending or has been reintroduced in many other states.

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For an example of how educators in one state reached out to policymakers, see:

- ***The California Dropout Research Project***[69]
  Alarmed by the reality of the dropout crisis, the project compiled and analyzed California's current data, existing research, and newly conducted research to inform policymakers and the public about the state's dropout challenge and potential solutions. The project let policymakers know that less than 75 percent of 9th graders in California graduate from high school, and the percentage in some districts is less than 50 percent. Its site also contains a number of research and policy reports on solving the dropout crisis that other states can adapt.

For a full explanation of why the compulsory school age should be raised, see:

- ***The Case for Reform***[70]
  A comprehensive report that explains fully why raising the compulsory school age is critical to addressing the dropout crisis across the nation. The report provides the latest research and shares the experiences of governors and state legislators as they worked to pass such laws. The report also includes examples of draft legislation. Communities are urging state legislators and governors to move forward on compulsory school age legislation. Such legislation will send the clear message that the state expects everyone to graduate from high school, and it makes support for struggling students a state priority.

69 http://www.lmri.ucsb.edu/dropouts/index.htm

70 http:/www.civicenterprises.net/pdfs/raisingschoolage.pdf

For a deeper look at the state data systems that enable communities to have reliable information about student success, see:

- **Data Quality Campaign, and especially its ten essential elements and fundamentals of a P-12 longitudinal system**[71]

For current state age benchmarks for education, see:

- **The Education Commission of the States**[72]
  State-by-state listing of the current required age for school entry, school leaving, total years of school required, future changes, and conditions for exceptions.

Support policies and resource allocations that improve teacher quality, student achievement, and higher graduation rates

Communities need to adopt a "return on investment" approach and invest in programs and strategies with proven track records for raising graduation and college readiness rates. They need to encourage all sectors of the community that focus on youth development to pool and coordinate their resources to enable the most efficient and effective use of available resources. They need to advocate at the state and federal level for the necessary resources to enable all their students to earn a high school diploma.

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For more information on programs designed to increase teacher quality, see:

- **The National Council for Teacher Quality annual yearbook**[73]
  Describing current and planned state-by-state policies.

Increase coordination between existing community and school programs aimed at youth development to make service delivery and use of funds more efficient.

71 http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/
72 http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/64/07/6407.pdf
73 http://www.nctq.org/stpy

For national organizations that have worked successfully with school districts to increase the supply of effective teachers and administrators to high-need schools, see:

- **Teach for America**[74]
- **New Leaders for New Schools**[75]

For comprehensive information about factors to consider in state and district financial policies that support raising student achievement and graduation rates, see:

- **The Strategic Management of Human Capital Center at the University of Wisconsin**[76]
- **The Annenberg Institute at Brown University**[77]
- **The Center on Reinventing Public Education and the School Finance Redesign Project at the University of Washington**[78]
- **The Center for Benefit-Cost Studies of Education at Teachers College of Columbia University**[79]

Urge national lawmakers to make increased high school graduation and college/workforce readiness a national priority

In 2008, there were a number of bills before Congress that, if enacted, would provide substantial federal help to local communities in their efforts to end the dropout crisis. These bills included:

- The Graduation Promise Act
- The Every Student Counts Act
- The Success in the Middle Act
- The Keeping Parents & Community Engaged (PACE) Act

74 http://www.teachforamerica.org
75 http://www.nlns.org
76 http://www.smhc-cpre.org
77 http://www.annenberginstitute.org
78 http://www.crpe.org/cs/crpe/view/projects/3
79 http://www.cbcse.org

- The Full-Service Community Schools Act
- Graduate for a Better Future Act

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To keep up with these policy initiatives and learn more about what your community can do to help, see:

- **First Focus**[80]
- **The Alliance for Excellent Education**[81]

80 http://www.firstfocus.net
81 http://www.all4ed.org

IV. Moving forward to create lasting change

You will need to build committed, communitywide involvement to put plans into action, so your community's powerful initiatives for improving graduation rates and children's futures not only can begin, but also can continue.

This section explains how you can create a lasting, communitywide commitment.

Here is how to use this section:

If you're ready to enlist people from your community to lead and sustain efforts, go to

Identifying leaders and building teams

If you're ready to kick off your communitywide effort or bring new energy to an on-going effort, go to

Organizing a summit to inspire and mobilize support

If you're ready to specify your community's vision and goals, go to

Developing a Community Graduation Compact

If you're ready to identify ways to ensure that progress continues, go to

Preparing for long-term action and success

Identifying leaders and building teams

Leadership

Respected, responsible, and committed to getting something done — who in your community will lead the effort to defeat the dropout crisis? Depending on your community, your efforts could be spearheaded by the superintendent, the mayor, a leading business person, a community college president, a local public education foundation or nonprofit organization, the Chamber of Commerce, the United Way, a leading insurance company, a school board member, parents and youth—or all of these in partnership.

Ideally, your leaders will have the social networks to involve other key community leaders. Above all, they will believe strongly that the crisis is real, that the community has to do something about it, and that they are willing to do whatever it takes to make change happen. Your leaders are people who won't take no for an answer, who cheer others on, and who always will go the extra mile to convince a fence-sitter to get involved.

Recruit a passionately committed, respected, effective person—or persons—to lead your community's efforts to improve graduation rates.

The lead team, the Dropout Prevention and Graduation Improvement Team

Your leaders can help enlist others, perhaps informally first and behind the scenes. The next steps they take may be public, as they form the lead committee, a 10- to 15-member Dropout Prevention and Graduation Improvement Team.

Working within requirements and standards set at the state level, this team may advocate for state-level changes that affect local progress. For example, a Dropout Prevention and Graduation Improvement Team's 10 primary responsibilities for its first year might be to:

Identify and recruit 10–15 people for your lead team – your Dropout Prevention and Graduation Improvement Team – and others for your work-group teams.

For tools that can help you find the best candidates for each job, see our:

- Serve as the steering committee for launching and guiding Year One work to improve graduation rates.
- Develop workgroup teams or subcommittees that will take ownership of specific aspects of the graduation improvement challenge.
- Map community assets and opportunities.
- Organize and summarize the data gathered by workgroup teams.
- Create a PowerPoint or other media presentation to tell the story of the dropout challenge to the wider community including the media.
- Identify and enlist additional individuals and organizations that are not yet involved.
- Develop a preliminary plan with three-, six-, nine-, and 12-month benchmarks for further work.
- Plan a summit to inform and mobilize the community.
- Begin building a formal community infrastructure, mechanisms, and resources to sustain the work over the next two to 10 years.
- Develop a Community Graduation Compact.

Workgroup teams

The Dropout Prevention and Graduation Improvement Team and your workgroup teams provide key leadership in Year One. From which pools of community members are you likely to assemble these teams?

- **Local civic and governmental agencies**, including the mayor and city council members, representatives of government agencies such as the departments of health and child welfare, regional education service agencies, economic development agencies, workforce development boards, the juvenile justice and

Asset Mapping for Individuals and Organizations

Identifying and Connecting the Community That Supports Students

A Checklist for Team Member Qualities

New Perspectives for Sustaining Change An Attitude and Belief Audit

Determine which people and organizations may serve an important role in your efforts.

law enforcement system, and two- and four-year colleges and universities

- **Local community representatives**, including members of the school board, Chamber of Commerce, faith-based organizations, community-based and other nonprofit organizations, hospitals and the public health system, media, and people from the business community
- **District- and school-related staff**, including the superintendent, principals, teachers, counselors, and those who serve as a link between schools and health, social, or justice agencies
- **Parents and students**, because local efforts often forget to involve the "customers" — the students themselves and the parents who support them
- **Partners in the America's Promise Alliance**, which includes more than 200 leading national organizations working to help more young people graduate from high school ready for college and work. Consider reaching out to their local affiliates for assistance in your community. Review the list of Alliance Partners.[1]

As your graduation improvement effort moves forward, workgroup teams become increasingly important. They will be examining the details of "what is" and make recommendations — within their team, to other teams, and to the Dropout Prevention and Graduation Improvement Team. Over time, their recommendations will connect with and complement each other.

One likely family of workgroup teams is:

- Policy and Financial Resources Team
- Community Data Team
- School Practices Team
- Student Support and Out-of-School-Time Team

1 http://www.americaspromise.org/AlliancePartners.aspx?id=6872

See the following chart and consider from your local perspective who else should be added in your community to build a partnership with the greatest effectiveness:

Community Representatives Chart

- Community Resources Team
- Media and Communications Team

However, every community is unique and the exact titles and duties will vary correspondingly.

Assemble workgroup teams that reflect your community's size and issues.

Policy and Financial Resources Team

Your Policy and Financial Resources Team will probably comprise people from civic government, community-based organizations, the school board chair and superintendent, and the higher education system. The team will be responsible for conducting the policy audit. This involves reviewing state, district, and local education, health, welfare, and justice system policies and practices, as well as federal and foundation funding — flow-through or from grants — for their impact on student success and failure. The team should determine how revising policies might keep more students on the path to graduation.

The team also should set long-, medium-, and short-term goals. For example:

- Long-term (three or more years): Major alterations in 1) state policies; 2) relationships, roles, and responsibilities among agencies and institutions; and/or 3) allocation of federal or state funding
- Medium-term (one to three years): Local changes in community policies, practices, roles, and relationships among community agencies, the nonprofit sector, businesses, districts and schools; program implementation and evaluation
- Short-term (one year and ongoing): Local changes in agencies' and schools' initiatives and programs, and roles and responsibilities connecting community agencies, institutions, families, and parents; program implementation and evaluation

Community Data Team

The members of the Community Data Team come from sectors with good access to existing data (such as educators, bankers, accountants and insurers). They are skilled at looking for patterns in numbers and think creatively about ways to access, compile, and analyze information.

As a group, the Community Data Team constructs an overall qualitative and quantitative picture of the community, identifies new types of data that need to be collected, and predicts future needs. State, local government, district, post-secondary education, and school-level leaders may be helpful in understanding data, framing questions, and posing challenges. They may also be joined by colleagues in the juvenile and adult justice and social welfare systems, and from state and local health and civic agencies as well as community-based organizations.

School Practices Team

What occurs within school walls that might influence eventual dropout or graduation? It is the job of your School Practices Team, under the leadership of the principal(s) and connected to the school's administrative or leadership team, to find out. In fact, depending on the school, an existing committee may be given this new responsibility.

This team's members examine school practices related to grading; responses to absenteeism, attendance, tardiness, and good and bad behavior; in-school and out-of-school suspensions; interactions with the courts and alternative disciplinary education systems; scheduling; mentoring, and tutoring; and incentive, recognition, and reward systems.

Parents and community partners are valuable members of this team, as are students at the secondary levels and district representatives. The initial product of this team's work might be a chart relating school practices to students' success or failure, and a series of questions about changes in school practices that might

produce improved student outcomes.

Student Support and Out-of-School-Time Team

A Student Support and Out-of-School-Time Team may include members from community-based organizations; faith-based organizations; health, welfare, and justice representatives; school district and school personnel; students; and parents. It is responsible for conducting an audit of support and intervention programs: what programs exist, their effect on student outcomes, whether there are overlaps in services, and what other programs are needed. This audit will reveal which students are being served, which are not, and what changes should be made. This team's first products might be a report detailing the number of:

- middle and high school students who are failing one or more courses and are receiving tutoring
- middle and high school students who have between five and 10 absences and now have mentors who work with them daily and weekly
- young mothers who are supported with day care and by a mentor
- young men who have difficulty connecting with others in a positive way and have mentors and case managers

The report will reveal the gap between what is currently delivered and what is still needed. Over the longer term, the team can make recommendations for new services that reach targeted students. Ultimately, all students will get the support services they need for success, in and out of school.

Community Resources Team

The Community Resources Team's responsibility is to identify and evaluate human, financial, and facility resources across the community. Assets include individual relationships within the community as well as formal institutional

relationships and networks. All of these assets can be put to good use and focused to produce results.

The team not only develops a profile of the community's resources, but also gets a sense of resources that could be re-designated or recombined in new ways, possibly across traditional barriers, or "silos," in government, agencies, and education systems.

For example, the team might track and evaluate resources that affect teacher, administrator, and service provider quality and availability; professional development for teachers; and training for mentors and tutors. It might also consider creative ways to take advantage of the private sector's expertise through loaned executive and manager programs; to piggyback existing resources through shared-use buses or facility programs; or to bring new services to students cost-effectively by providing school space to community-based organizations. In these and other ways, the team's work can lead to expanded service networks across the community.

Media and Communications Team

Before you can make progress, you need to get attention. Word needs to get out across your community that there is a dropout crisis, it is solvable, and you and other community members are doing something about it. While the team can begin with a small, dedicated group, effective long-term communications require a strategy, whose goals might be to:

- share information so the community becomes deeply aware of the dropout challenge
- change attitudes and beliefs as necessary
- create a wellspring of support for efforts
- invite individuals and organizations to become involved and take action

For a sample of how a Media and Communications Team might function and what it might do, see our:

Organizing a Team

For types of attitudes and beliefs the team might want to address, see:

New Perspectives for Sustaining Change: An Attitude and Belief Audit

In each community different factors influence attendance, behavior, and graduation. The team will want a clear understanding of what those factors are so it can devise a campaign that prioritizes and addresses them.

Organizing a Dropout Prevention Summit to inspire and mobilize support

A local Dropout Prevention Summit is a powerful way to begin implementing your community's plan. In fact, some communities may choose to hold a summit before the plan exists, while you are still in the process of *Rallying Your Community to End the Dropout Crisis (Part I)*. This kind of early-phase summit will help you educate key people about the facts of the crisis and build support for devising a plan.

In other communities, a summit may be more effective after research findings have been compiled, a plan has been written or is on the way, and your champions — leaders, team members, partner organizations and agencies, parents, and others — are known. The summit brings them together so they can go forward on the same track and with tremendous enthusiasm.

Based on the preliminary work of the Dropout Prevention and Graduation Team and the workgroup teams, invite 150-200 of the community's key leaders from all sectors to the summit. At the summit, present the data and make the case for local action. Seek commitment for future involvement from all summit participants before they leave.

Between now and early 2010, the America's Promise Alliance will support dropout prevention summits in all 50 states and in more than 50 cities with dire dropout statistics.

Invite the community's key leaders from all sectors to a Dropout Prevention Summit.

For suggestions on organizing the summit, including planning, policy, communications, and other helpful tools, go to the America's Promise Alliance page.[1]

1 http://www.americaspromise.org/APAPage.aspx?id=10158

At the summit

- **Set expectations:** Let participants know a Community Graduation Compact will be completed within a year of the summit.
- **Personalize the experience:** Emphasize that people and relationships are vital in keeping students on graduation pathways. Honor community contributions. Invite guests to share their perspectives on why they care, why improvement is needed, what they already are doing, and what they would like to learn and do in the future. Make sure young people talk about their experiences as drop-outs and near dropouts.
- **Get to work:** Show how serious your initiative is and how capable your people are by involving guests, working in groups, or using self-directed tools, in half- to full-day sessions.
- **Sign them up:** Seek an "exit ticket" card from each summit participant, committing the person to some level of action. Options might include:
  - Become a member of the lead Dropout Prevention and Graduation Improvement Team
  - Chair or join one of the workgroup teams
  - Provide other support that will help mobilize the community for action
  - Commit to being part of the Community Graduation Compact

Organize workshop sessions during the Summit to demonstrate strong commitment to productivity and change.

For one approach to the workshops, use our template:

Sample Working Session for Increasing the Graduation Rate and Reducing the Dropout Rate in Our Community

Invite discussions on specific topics, such as wraparound services in your communities.

To guide these discussions, use the sample questions in our:

Leaders Moving Forward

Developing a Community Graduation Compact

A Community Graduation Compact puts into words your community's shared vision of students who graduate prepared for higher education, work, and life, and provides a road map for going forward. It includes short-, medium-, and long-term goals and benchmarks, along with a process for reaching agreement and making decisions. This last component is especially important as many individuals and groups may have no previous formal relationship working with each other.

A Community Graduation Compact:

- sets clear goals, benchmarks, and timelines
- builds partners by
  - carefully spelling out the different partners whose collaborative efforts will lead to increasing the graduation rate
  - identifying the unique roles and responsibilities of everyone involved (within state and local governing structures) — detailing who will do what and when, and who will be held accountable for what and how
- looks to the future by providing partners with a process for monitoring and measuring outcomes and modifying plans over the years

The compact can be revised formally on an annual basis as the community gains knowledge and experience working together, or it can be revised and refined informally.

Underlying each Community Graduation Compact are three questions:

- What are the attitudes and beliefs that need to be dealt with before wholehearted, communitywide support for efforts can occur?
- What new organizational and leadership structures are needed?

Develop a Community Graduation Compact.

To see an example, go to our:

Sample Community Graduation Compact

Or see the America's Promise Alliance's Dropout Prevention Action Planning Guide and Worksheet.[2]

2 http://www.americaspromise.org

- What efforts — by education funds, national nonprofits, or local community development organizations — are already at work in your community, so you can partner with them and build on their efforts?

Setting clear goals

Setting clear time-linked goals is an important function of your Community Graduation Compact. Examples of 10-year goals might be:

- Average graduation rates in each high school (using the National Governors Association calculation method) will reach 90 percent.
- Graduation gaps among students of different ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds will be narrowed to 5 percent in each high school.
- One hundred percent of regular diploma graduates will be eligible for admission to our community college system, and 90 percent will be eligible for admission to the four-year college system.

Successfully achieving these long-term goals will depend on setting and reaching other short- and medium-term goals. These often relate to early child development and welfare, school attendance, behavior, credit accumulation, curriculum and instruction, and early identification of students who are "falling off track," as well as tutoring, mentoring, and family support.

For attitudes and beliefs your Compact may need to consider, see:

New Perspectives for Sustaining Change: An Attitude and Belief Audit

Set long-term, quantifiable goals for reducing dropouts and increasing graduation rates.

Set shorter- and medium-term supporting goals needed to achieve long-term goals.

For examples of supporting goals a community might set to reach long-term goals, see our:

Sample Short- and Medium-Term Goals

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To learn more about managing communitywide change, see:

- **The Forum for Youth Investment's *Ready by 21 Challenge*[2]**
  Addresses the challenges of change head-on: if efforts toward change are disconnected, the energy for change may decrease. It is a challenge to all who care about children and youth to think differently – to learn a different way to approach all of the tasks associated with trying to manage, make or measure change at any level from the classroom to the capitol – so that they can act differently.

2 http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/readyby21

Specifically, so that they can make decisions that lead to bigger goals, bolder strategies, better partnerships.

- **The Youth Transition Funders Group's *Whatever it Takes: How Twelve Communities Are Reconnecting Out-of-School Youth***[3]
  The report tells the story of 12 communities across the U.S. that have reclaimed their schools and turned around dropout rates in their communities. The communities used varied and innovative methods, as there is no cookie-cutter plan for every community to follow. However, major themes run though each community's success: open entry/open exit; flexible scheduling and year-round learning; teachers acting as coaches, facilitators, and crew leaders; clear codes of conduct with consistent enforcement; extensive support services; and a portfolio of options for varied groups.
- ***A Collective Responsibility, A Collective Work: Supporting the Path to Positive Life Outcomes for Youth in Economically Distressed Communities***[4]
  Discusses how communities can band together and offer a wide variety of supportive activities to bolster their youth's successes in school and life. Individualized support has a significant impact on shaping young people's lives, especially as children grow older. These support continuums should contain three key elements to be effective: 1) each must provide opportunities for youth to be engaged continuously in activities that develop skills in multiple domains; 2) a coalition of leaders from key sectors and systems must rally around the continuum; and 3) the continuum must connect all of the local and state youth resources. This report recommends that communities with large populations of youth in distress take the following seven actions to build a continuum of support: 1) elevate the youth challenge in a holistic way; 2) galvanize community around the challenge and commit to building solutions; 3) create a forum for vision and planning; 4) address the developmental needs of youths, putting particular focus on those who are falling behind; 5) leverage existing resources in the community; 6) establish measures of accountability; and 7) be bold.

3 http://www.aypf.org/publications/WhateverItTakes/WITfull.pdf

4 http://www.clasp.org/publications/collectiveresponsibility.pdf

Preparing for long-term action and success

Setting benchmarks and timelines to achieve goals

The likelihood of ongoing, sustained progress in combating the dropout crisis will be greater if markers of an effort's progress — benchmarks — are in place and linked with timelines. For each effort undertaken, establish short-, mid-, and long-term benchmarks, each of which should address measurable, meaningful, and varied features of the effort.

Measuring progress against benchmarks will require you to get information and feedback consistently as you go forward. Regularly checking outcomes and impact against benchmarks will reveal which in- and out-of-school initiatives are effective and which wraparound supports are making a difference, and which of either of these need to be modified or eliminated.

For the greatest success, everyone needs to take responsibility for meeting benchmarks and achieving progress. Community leaders must hold themselves and their colleagues accountable and commit to making any adjustments necessary along the way.

Keeping everyone's eyes on the long-term reward — achieving 10-year goals

As teams become deeply involved in their work, the amount of effort required and the size of the challenge they face may seem overwhelming. Team members may become frustrated, and, not unlike dropouts, may disengage.

Teams can take several steps to make sure enthusiasm and progress remain at a high level for the entire 10-year horizon of your effort:

- **Revisit goals and priorities.** As teams learn which efforts are working, which aren't, and what resources are available, they can take satisfaction in their successes and streamline plans to make workloads more manageable.
- **Organize and prioritize goals** to better match members' time and financial resources availabilities. What can be done well in the short term to accomplish results by reallocating existing resources? What can be done well in the mid-term that may require more significant changes in resource allocation or in policies? What initiatives will take several years of preparation before they can be implemented effectively?
- **Consider long-term leadership and staffing** from the outset and along the way. For the long term, who will oversee the team's work? How will work and progress be recognized? How will issues and transitions in leadership be managed? Are relationships growing between the team's leadership and the leadership of other existing organizations in the community?

Congratulations on recognizing the need for action in your community, and on moving forward with action plans tailored to your community.

To help you in your planning efforts, we have developed a **quick assessment tool**[1] that takes inventory of what you already have in place and what gaps still need to be addressed. Please feel free to use this as a way of informing and driving your action planning process.

Grad Nation Action Tool

Please use this as a helpful way to drive your action planning and address your community's drop-out challenge	Answer *(Yes/No)*	To Do List
1. Rallying Your Community to End the Dropout Crisis		
a. Do you have accurate data concerning your drop-out challenge? (p. 8, p. 17)		
b. Have you compared this data to other districts; to your state; to other states; and to the national rate? (p. 9)		
c. Have you assessed the costs of your dropouts to the local economy and community? (p. 10)		
2. Understanding Your Dropout Rate		
a. Do you know where the problem is the worst in your community/state? (pp. 21-22)		
b. Do you know which students are dropping out; for what reason; and at what rate? (pp. 23-25)		
c. Have you surveyed low-attendance students as to why they don't attend school regularly? (p. 26)		
d. Have you surveyed students as to how they view their classroom and school experience? (p. 27)		
e. Have you asked dropouts and those who appear close to dropping out why they are doing so? (pp. 27-28)		
f. Have you catalogued all student supports/wraparound services across the four key transitions? (p. 31)		

1 http://www.americaspromise.org/uploadedFiles/AmericasPromiseAlliance/Grad_Nation/Tools/GradNation_ActionTool.pdf

Grad Nation Action Tool Continued

2. Understanding Your Dropout Rate (Continued)	Answer *(Yes/No)*	To Do List
g. Do you know which student supports/wraparound services are most effective and how many students each is reaching? (p. 30)		
h. Have you reviewed current policies to ensure that they are all aligned with best practice? (pp. 36-38) i. Local District: 1. Attendance 2. Grade retention 3. Grade promotion 4. Grading policy 5. Referral to GED programs 6. Referral to alternative schools ii. State Level 1. School accountability measures (what is being measured) 2. Compulsory school age		
i. Do you understand your high school graduates' success rate in college? (pp. 34-36)		
3. Solutions for Comprehensively Addressing Your Community's Dropout Crisis		
a. Is your approach comprehensive? (pp. 41-43)		
b. Do you have a plan to transform the middle and high schools which most of your community's dropouts attended? (pp. 44-48)		
c. Have you developed comprehensive student supports and addressed all Promises of the 5 Promise framework? (pp. 49–51)		
d. Have you substantially increased the number of skilled and committed adults (including parents) who provide student supports? (pp. 52-55)		
e. Have you created and launched a community-wide campaign to improve all students' attendance? (pp. 55-56)		
f. Have you provided a rigorous college and work preparatory curriculum for all secondary school students? (pp. 57-60)		
g. Have you developed early warning systems based on (A, B, C's) attendance, behavior and course performance? (pp. 62-63)		

Grad Nation Action Tool Continued

3. Solutions for Comprehensively Addressing Your Community's Dropout Crisis (Continued)	Answer *(Yes/No)*	To Do List
h. Have you developed a multi-tier response system based on the warning systems above that address: 1) prevention; 2) moderate intensity supports; and 3) intensive, case-managed responses when other interventions are not sufficient? (pp. 64-65)		
i. Have you developed "multiple pathways" to graduation, based on assessed needs and appropriate support structures? (pp. 65-66)		
j. Are you supporting policies that (pp. 67-71): i. Promote accurate graduation and drop-out data? ii. Raise compulsory school age requirements to 18? iii. Improve teacher quality, student achievement and higher graduation rates? iv. Adopt a return-on-investment approach to resource allocation? v. Align with current and complementary federal legislation and legislative initiatives?		
4. Moving Forward To Create Lasting Change		
a. Do you have a broad-based and cross-sector collaboration (a Community Graduation Compact) to address the dropout challenge, including leadership from schools, business, government, child welfare, nonprofits service providers, youth and parents? (pp. 73-74)		
b. Is this collaboration appropriately organized and supported to drive needed progress? (pp. 75-80)		
c. Are you using a dropout prevention summit to galvanize the broader community to collective civic action on this front? (pp. 80-81)		
d. Are you institutionalizing this "Compact" to set goals, monitor progress and hold the entire community accountable for success over time? (pp. 82-84)		

Training and assistance

At every step, remember, you are not alone. There are people and organizations at hand and across the country who are more than ready to support — and cheer for — your success.

If you and your fellow school and community leaders have questions and/or need assistance with your efforts to increase high school graduation rates and college and workforce readiness, you can turn to the groups listed below. They are experienced, respected providers of technical assistance to states, communities, schools, and districts.

Academy for Educational Development
1825 Connecticut Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20009
202-884-8000
http://www.aed.org/

Annenberg Institute for School Reform
Brown University
Box 1958
Providence, RI 02912
410-863-7790
http://www.annenberginstitute.org

Career Academy Support Network
Graduate School of Education
University of California at Berkeley
Berkeley, CA 94720
510-643-5748
http://casn.berkeley.edu

Council of Great City Schools
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 702
Washington, DC, 20004
http://www.cgcs.org

Data Quality Campaign
4030-2 West Braker Lane, Suite 200
Austin, TX 78759
512.320.1816
http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/

Education Trust
1250 H Street, NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC, 20005
202-293-1217
http://www.edtrust.org/edtrust

EdWorks
4350 Glendale-Milford Road
Cincinnati, OH 45242
(513) 824-6000
http://www.edworkspartners.org/whoisedworks/

Everyone Graduates Center
Center for Social Organization of Schools
Johns Hopkins University
3003 N. Charles Street, Suite 200
Baltimore, MD 21218
410-516-8800
http://www.every1graduates.org

First Things First
308 Glendale Drive
Toms River, NJ 08753
732-557-0200 and 215-545-1335
http://www.irre.org/ftf

High School Survey of Student Engagement
Center for Evaluation & Education Policy
1900 East Tenth Street
Bloomington, IN 47406-7512
812.856.1429
http://www.indiana.edu/~ceep/hssse

High Schools That Work
Southern Regional Education Board
592 10th Street, NW
Atlanta, GA, 30318
404-875-9211
http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/HSTWindex.asp

Jobs for the Future
88 Broad Street
Boston, MA, 02110
617-728-4446
http://www.jff.org

National Academy Foundation
39 Broadway, Suite 1640
New York, NY 10006
212.635.2400
http://www.naf.org

National Center for Student Engagement
Colorado Foundation for Families and Children
450 Lincoln St., Suite 100
Denver, CO 80203
1-888-272-0454 ext. 115
http://www.schoolengagement.org/

National Conference of State Legislatures
7700 East First Place
Denver, CO 80230
303-364-7700
http://www.ncsl.org

National High School Center
American Institutes for Research (AIR)
1000 Thomas Jefferson Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007
1-800-634-0503
http://www.betterhighschools.org

National League of Cities
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 550
Washington, DC 20004
202-626-3000
http:/www.nlc.org

National Governors Association's Center for Best Practices
444 N. Capitol St., Suite 267
Washington, D.C. 20001
202-624-5300
http://www.nga.org/center

North Central Comprehensive Center
Hamline University
1536 Hewitt Avenue, MS C-1924
St. Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-523-2079
http://www.mcrel.org/nccc

Northwest Regional Comprehensive Center
101 SW Main St., Suite 500
Portland, Oregon 97204-3213
1-800-547-6339
http://www.nwrel.org/nwrcc

Phi Delta Kappa International
Curriculum Management Center
P.O. Box 789
Bloomington, IN 47402
800-766-1156
http://www.pdkintl.org/icmc/audits.htm

Public Education Network
601 Thirteenth Street, NW, Suite 710
Washington, DC 20005
202-628-7460
http://www.PublicEducation.org

SERVE Center at University of North Carolina at Greensboro
P.O. Box 5367
Greensboro, NC 27435
800-755-3277
http://www.serve.org

Stanford School Re-Design Network
SRN Leads
Stanford University
505 Lasuen Mall
Stanford, CA 94305
650-725-0703
http://www.srnleads.org

Talent Development High Schools and Talent Development Middle Schools
Center for Social Organization of Schools
Johns Hopkins University
3003 N. Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21218
410-516-8800
http://www.csos.jhu.edu

WestEd
730 Harrison Street
San Francisco, CA 94107
1-877-4WestEd or 415-565-3000
http://www.wested.org

Feedback?

We welcome your feedback and encourage you to share your successes and questions. Please direct comments to GradNation@americaspromise.org.

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