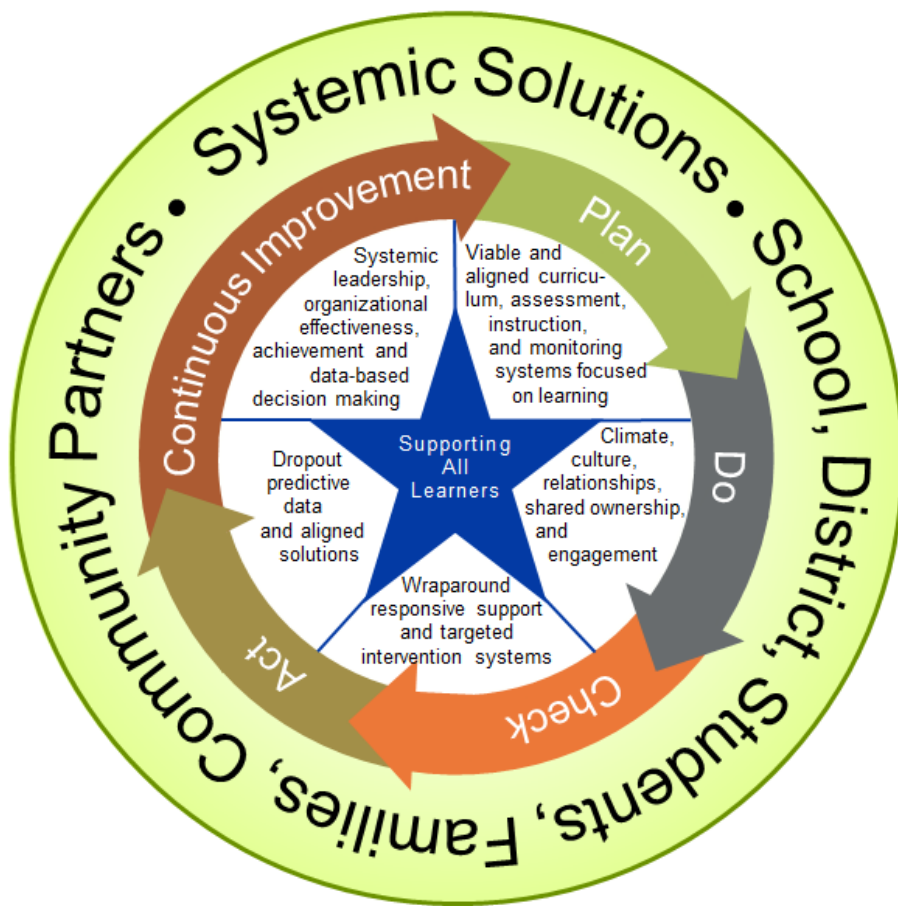


Program Assessment and Review (PAR)

An Improvement Process
and Dropout Prevention Process
for
States, Local Educational
Agencies, Communities,
and Schools



NATIONAL
DROPOUT
PREVENTION
CENTER/NETWORK

209 Martin Street
Clemson University
Clemson, SC 29631
www.dropoutprevention.org

The National Dropout Prevention Center/ Network (NDPC/N)

is a public/private (nonprofit) national organization whose mission is to increase graduation rates through research and evidence-based solutions, enabling all students to graduate college and career ready, prepared to successfully transition to next steps.

The organization's framework is built upon deep research and meta-analyses of research, as well as research that has been translated into systemic solutions involving school, district, student, family, and community partners. The major components of the framework include:

- **Systemic leadership and vision, organizational effectiveness, data-based decision making, and aligned practices, procedures, and policies**
- **Guaranteed, viable, and aligned curriculum, assessment, instruction, and monitoring systems focused on student learning**
- **Climate, culture, relationships, shared ownership, and engagement**
- **Wraparound responsive support and targeted intervention systems**
- **Dropout predictive risk factors**

NDPC/N offers a number of outreach services to schools, communities, local education agencies, and states. One of the most popular of these is NDPN's Program Assessment and Review (PAR).

Program Assessment and Review (PAR) National Dropout Prevention Center/Network Clemson University Clemson, South Carolina

The NDPN PAR process is aligned with NDPC/N's research and systemic solutions framework and provides research-based strategies as well as expert assistance to schools, communities, local educational agencies, and states. Each phase of PAR is facilitated through collaboration with a local action team (LAT) consisting of representatives from the school(s), district(s), agency(ies) and/or state(s) contracting the service, as well as members of the communities served. The LAT, the ultimate consumer of the data collected and the reports provided through PAR, may use the information to adopt and further develop action plans for each school and community not only to increase graduation rates but also to strengthen and give added focus to continuous improvement efforts.

The goals of PAR include identification of areas for improvement based on effective strategies research; development of a comprehensive plan and recommended actions; and help for the organization in developing its own capacity for self-directed, continuous improvement and evaluation. The multistep and customized PAR process enables the collaborative and systematic review and analysis of multiple points of data arising from student achievement, attendance, and discipline reports; analysis of climate, culture, and engagement; assessment of levels of awareness and availability of educational options for youth in at-risk situations; review of leadership efforts, practices, policies, and procedures; onsite observations; focus group sessions; perception surveys; and multiple stakeholder interviews. Data collection and analyses culminate in recommendations and tiered plans for improvement.

PAR provides top-shelf, research-based strategies and solutions, along with professional assistance to states, districts, schools, and programs.



Phases of PAR

PAR procedures and time frames are designed to provide minimum disruption to normal school or program activities while allowing adequate time to analyze data; observe operating programs and classroom practices; and interview selected key staff, related support personnel, and selected community partners. PAR typically consists of seven recommended phases.

Phase 1: Preparation

The preparation phase allows the contracting agency to make a firm commitment to participate in the PAR process and to establish a structure for involvement. The tasks include the following:

- The schools/districts/agencies/state make a commitment to engage in the PAR process.
- The schools/districts/agencies/state establish an LAT and identify other organizations and agencies to provide support to the LAT.
- The LAT selects a chairperson.
- NDPN creates a list of specific preliminary data to be assembled by the schools/districts/agencies/ state, such as achievement scores; attendance; retention; dropout statistics; any previous pertinent study data; and student, staff, and community demographics.
- The LAT gathers requested information and data and forwards it to the NDPC/N at Clemson.
- The LAT may choose to administer customized surveys developed by the NDPN, including strategies and practices checklists and questionnaires, to provide a picture of the school(s) or agency(ies) as perceived by staff, administrators, teachers, students, and business and community representatives, and as related to the scope of the PAR. These instruments may be customized to measure perceptions or existence of problems related to other issues as contracted by the school/district/agency/state. If customized surveys are developed and administered, the LAT sends completed surveys to the NDPC/N or the surveys are conducted and collected online on a site hosted by the NDPC/N, whichever is most feasible for the LAT or organization.

Phase 2: Data Review and Analysis

During the data review and analysis phase, PAR facilitators at the NDPN compile all information received during the preparation period and the preliminary review process begins. PAR facilitators conduct a thorough review and analysis of school data forwarded from the LAT, including an analysis of the results of any surveys administered prior to site visits, to identify potential gaps and areas for improvement or further investigation.

Phase 3: The Site Visit

A major component of the PAR process is the external review team's on-site visit, which is designed to gather qualitative data and to study the current policies and practices in the school(s)/agency(ies), review various school/district/state and community conditions that support student performance, gather opinions and perspectives from numerous professionals and school partners, and gain a sense of the school and/or community climate geared toward continuous improvement.

The activities include the following:

- The PAR team visits the school/agency/community and correlates observations with previous data analyses.
- The PAR team observes facilities; space allocations; how dropout prevention programs relate to other programs in the schools, districts, or community; and other areas within the scope of the PAR.
- Observations focus on leadership practices; student achievement; student engagement; climate and culture; classroom management; curriculum materials; use of research-based instructional strategies; counseling and support systems; and other support services related to student achievement, engagement, success, and graduation.
- Individual interviews and panel discussions are scheduled and held with selected staff, parents, students, and/or other related school and agency representatives.
- PAR facilitators participate in an exit discussion of observations.

Phase 4: Review and Analysis of Site Visit Data

The review of local documents and data as well as the on-site visit observations and interview data provide information for a detailed narrative report focusing on the organizational and instructional effectiveness of the school/agency/program. The PAR report includes commendations as well as the identification of program areas that appear to be least productive or in conflict with the current research. A list of recommendations is always included for review and consideration by the local action team.

This phase allows the PAR team to integrate local information from multiple sources into a coherent report reflecting current conditions, policies, and practices in the school/program. The tasks include the following:

- The PAR team combines and analyzes the information recorded during the site visit(s).
- The PAR team develops conclusions and recommendations based on the review of the data sent by the LAT, the results of any assessment surveys, and the school visit observations and interviews.
- The PAR team leader compiles a report for the LAT. The report includes observations about specific strengths and weaknesses as well as program suggestions and recommendations.

Phase 5: Report and Discussion

The report and discussion phase provides a forum for discussing the observations and recommendations outlined in the PAR report. The activities in this phase include the following:

- The PAR team leader meets with the LAT to present the report, discuss the findings, and collaboratively identify and make corrections and amendments as needed.
- The LAT and the PAR team leader discuss ways to identify strategies that address the needs of the school, agency, community, and the students.

Phase 6: Action Planning (With Optional NDPN Assistance)

The purpose of the action planning phase is to allow the LAT to explore new or revised policies and/or practices and to make decisions on prioritizing and implementing new programs. This phase includes the following activities:

- The LAT members and representatives from other support groups identify successful program sites where the LAT might review model policies and practices.
- The LAT considers program recommendations, sets priorities for change, and develops an action plan.

The PAR team leader may be involved in this phase and can recommend model policies and programs as well as assist with the development of an action plan.

Phase 7: Implementing the Action Plan (With Optional NDPN Assistance)

In this phase of the PAR process, the LAT serves as the guiding force to ensure the successful implementation of the action plan, acts as the motivating force to maintain enthusiasm for accomplishing the plan, and serves as the monitoring force to ensure that the plan is producing the desired results.

The LAT has the option to contract additionally with the NDPN to work in collaboration in identifying appropriate technical assistance, professional development, and consultants who can provide both. The NDPN often is contracted to partner throughout Phase 7 to collaboratively develop evaluation protocols and instruments, to continue to provide technical assistance, and to simultaneously build internal leadership capacity within the organization for continuous improvement.

After the PAR: Impact Data Collection

As part of the PAR process, the NDPN will request some brief feedback on school/district/agency/state and LAT satisfaction with the PAR process, and then later, data to evaluate the effectiveness of the PAR process and the results of recommendations.

Key Fact: Dropping out of school is the result of a long process of disengagement that may begin even before a child enters school. Through years of research and experience working with schools and school systems nationwide, the NDPC/N has developed a storehouse of explicit and tacit knowledge to address both the factors that contribute to students dropping out and the strategies that have been found effective in keeping students in school.

Success Stories

The following are but a few examples of how other schools and communities have successfully used PAR.

In the **Henderson County School District (NC)**, the superintendent used the PAR report as a starting point for school and community discussions that led to new districtwide attendance policies and new approaches for working with parents in each of the district's schools.

Spartanburg School District Five (SC) used PAR to study the district's plan for working with students in at-risk situations. PAR helped the district implement a comprehensive plan for transition from middle school to high school. Special attention was placed on eighth-grade students who have low-performance records.

Faced with an extremely high dropout rate in the **Hart County School District (GA)**, a community-based organization, **Hart Partners**, used PAR to find solutions. As a result of PAR recommendations, a school-community dropout committee was formed, and school improvement plans were developed for each school in the district. Emphasis was placed on reading programs for low-performing students.

The **Shoreline Community College in Seattle (WA)** operates a Career Education Options program, which is a credit recovery program for students ages 16 to 21 who have been expelled or suspended or who have dropped out of high school. The college used PAR to guide the restructuring of staff development and improvements in the instructional environment and teaching strategies.

PAR helped the **Dallas Independent School District (TX)** assess districtwide alternative education programs and the alternative campus learning centers in selected high schools. As a result, modifications were made in instructional strategies and in the administrative structure of the campus learning centers. In addition, the local Chamber of Commerce increased its involvement in dropout prevention programs.

When the **Stephens County School District (GA)** wanted an independent assessment of the countywide dropout prevention programs for expelled and adjudicated students, they chose the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network and PAR. The technical assistance offered by NDPC/N provided innovative modifications for those programs, which are coordinated by the CrossRoads Alternative School in conjunction with the juvenile court system and the Stephens County Department of Juvenile Justice.

The **State of Alaska** wanted to reduce dropout among Alaska Native students in three school districts. The NDPC/N was asked to conduct a PAR in each district, provide recommendations for improvement, and help develop a model for dropout prevention that focused on Alaska Native students. At the end of this three-year project, the graduation rate among Alaska Native students had increased by an average of 15% across the three targeted school districts.

The comprehensive and customizable aspects of PAR uniquely guide school and community leaders to be able to improve student academic achievement levels and increase high school graduation rates.

Important Questions for Responsible School Leaders

- Are students' achievement scores meeting/exceeding state standards?
- Are your high school completion rates satisfactory? Are they in line with the new 4-year cohort expectations?
- Are you satisfied with the parental/community participation at your school?
- Do you have an academic achievement plan for low-performing students?
- Do your classroom teaching strategies address the academic needs of low-performing students? Are you transitioning appropriately to the new Common Core?
- Do you have a research-based process in place to guide your school improvement projects?
- Do you have effective strategies in place to provide options and support for struggling students as well as an environment for success of such strategies?





**NATIONAL
DROPOUT
PREVENTION
CENTER/NETWORK**

209 Martin Street, Clemson, SC 29631-1555 | ph 864.656.2599

www.dropoutprevention.org | ndpc@clemson.edu