15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention

Since 1986, the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) has conducted and analyzed research, sponsored workshops and national conferences, and collaborated with a variety of practitioners to further the mission of reducing America's dropout rate by meeting the needs of youth in at-risk situations, including students with disabilities.

Students report a variety of reasons for dropping out of school; therefore, the solutions are multidimensional. The NDPC/N has identified 15 Effective Strategies that have the most positive impact on the high school graduation rate. These strategies appear to be independent, but actually work well together and frequently overlap. Although they can be implemented as stand-alone programs (i.e., mentoring or family engagement projects), positive outcomes will result when school districts develop a program improvement plan that encompasses most or all of these strategies. These strategies have been successful in all school levels from K-12 and in rural, suburban, or urban centers. The strategies are grouped into four clusters to provide a framework for planning local programs as well as evaluating the effectiveness for targeted or schoolwide interventions.

School And Community Perspective
★ Systemic Renewal
★ School-Community Collaboration
★ Safe Learning Environments

Early Interventions
★ Family Engagement
★ Early Childhood Education
★ Early Literacy Development

Basic Core Strategies
★ Mentoring/Tutoring
★ Service-Learning
★ Alternative Schooling
★ After-School Opportunities

Making the Most of Instruction
★ Professional Development
★ Active Learning
★ Educational Technology
★ Individualized Instruction
★ Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Effective Strategies Defined

★ **Systemic Renewal**—Systemic renewal calls for a continuing process of evaluating goals and objectives related to school policies, practices, programs, and organizational structures as they impact a diverse group of learners.

★ **School-Community Collaboration**—When all groups in a community provide collective support to the school, a strong infrastructure of partnerships sustains a caring environment where youth can thrive and achieve.

★ **Safe Learning Environments**—A comprehensive violence prevention plan, including conflict resolution, must deal with potential violence as well as crisis management. A safe learning environment provides daily experiences, at all grade levels, that enhance positive social attitudes and effective interpersonal skills in all students in all classrooms.

★ **Family Engagement**—Research consistently finds that family engagement has a direct, positive effect on children's achievement and is one of the most accurate predictors of a student's success in school.

★ **Early Childhood Education**—Birth-to-five interventions demonstrate that providing a child additional enrichment can enhance brain development. Also, the most effective way to reduce the number of children who will ultimately drop out is to provide the best possible classroom instruction from the beginning of their school experience through the primary grades.

★ **Early Literacy Development**—Early literacy interventions to help low-achieving students improve their reading and writing skills establish the necessary foundation for effective learning in all subjects.

★ **Mentoring/Tutoring**—Mentoring is a one-to-one caring, supportive relationship between a mentor and a mentee that is based on trust. Mentoring offers a significant support structure for high-risk students. Tutoring, also a one-to-one activity, focuses on academics and is an effective practice when addressing specific needs such as reading, writing, or math competencies.

★ **Service-Learning**—Service-learning connects meaningful community service experiences with academic learning. This teaching/learning method promotes personal and social growth, career development, and civic responsibility and can be a powerful vehicle for effective school reform at all grade levels.

★ **Alternative Schooling**—Alternative schooling provides potential dropouts a variety of options that can lead to graduation, with programs paying special attention to the student's individual social needs, workforce skills, and academic requirements for a high school diploma.

★ **After-School Opportunities**—Many schools provide after-school and summer enhancement programs that eliminate information loss and inspire interest in a variety of areas. Such experiences are especially important for students at risk of school failure because they fill the afternoon "gap time" with constructive and engaging activities.

★ **Professional Development**—Teachers and counselors who work with youth at high risk of academic failure need to feel supported and have an avenue by which they can continue to develop skills, techniques, and learn about innovative strategies.

★ **Active Learning**—Differentiated learning embraces teaching and learning strategies that engage and involve students in the learning process. Students find new and creative ways to solve problems, achieve success, and become lifelong learners when educators show them that there are different ways to learn.

★ **Educational Technology**—Technology offers some of the best opportunities for delivering instruction to engage students in authentic learning, addressing multiple intelligences, and adapting to students' learning styles. Online learning and credit recovery options are key approaches to use.

★ **Individualized Instruction**—Each student has unique interests and past learning experiences. An individualized instructional plan for each student allows for flexibility in teaching methods and motivational strategies to consider these individual differences.

★ **Career and Technical Education (CTE)**—A quality CTE program and a related career guidance program are essential for all students. School-to-work programs recognize that youth need specific skills to prepare them for the increased demands of today's workplace.