National Dropout Prevention Center/Network Vol. 19 No. 2 Spring 2007

NEWSLETTER

Educational Policies

Policy Matters

This newsletter explores the topic of educational policies—at all levels. Much of the current national attention has been focused on the reauthorization of the *No Child Left Behind Act*; as we all know, this federal policy has had a significant impact on schools all across the country. For better or worse. And as reauthorization is hotly debated, from the local to national arena, the benefits of such national policy as well as its negative impacts are being closely scrutinized. But even as national education policy grabs the headlines, policies at other levels are having a powerful effect as well. Are we paying attention to these policies and whether or not they are pushing students out or pulling students in?

It is therefore our intent in this issue to look at educational policy wherever it is found: school, district, state, or nation. So many policies at all levels are making a difference in the lives of countless students, as well as with parents, teachers, administrators, school boards, and their communities. The policies have the potential to save students, but they also have the potential to exclude our most at-risk and vulnerable young people. And those of us concerned about dropout prevention must know the difference, and we must become the advocates for those policies that will produce a higher graduation rate. We also need to be aware of school policies that increase the dropout rate and find ways to take them off the books.

One such example is the policy of retention. Research on this issue is crystal clear. Students who are overage for grade due to one or more retentions are among the most likely candidates for dropping out of school. If a student has been retained twice, no matter when it happened during his or her school years, the chance of becoming a dropout is approximately 90%. To continue to follow such a policy of retaining those who fail a grade is counterproductive; alternatives to such a policy should be supported.

We often underestimate our influence as educational leaders and the power of the Network to improve the dropout rate by advocating specific policies. The NDPC/N has been working with Mississippi for the past six years, providing technical assistance as their legislators work to come to grips with their high dropout rates. Due to this involvement, legislation has been implemented and the Mississippi Department of Education has incorporated the 15 Effective Strategies, promoted by NDPC/N. These strategies and a blend of new funds, such as those from foundations or corporate donations, are advancing research-based policies and program changes in local schools and communities that will result in more students being engaged in learning, more students staying in school, and more students graduating.

Expanding on this example of how new funds and how policy matters is the Gilmore Foundation, a regional foundation in Northeast Mississippi, with a policy commitment to support dropout prevention initiatives by focusing on early childhood education and on the enhanced use of technology in schools and in the community. Specifically, with financial support of the Gilmore Foundation, the entire city of Amory is "wired" for free use of the Internet, and every high school senior in the local school district is provided a free laptop. Upon graduation, it becomes their gift.

Another area to examine where policy matters is the education commitments of civic leaders, specifically the mayors of major cities. Most of these mayors have an executive team member who works with the local school systems. Often the mayor will promote program policies and major dropout prevention initiatives through his or her office. Such is the case in the City of Houston, where Mayor Bill White has a major initiative to increase the high school graduation rate.

This issue provides you with some thought-provoking articles. We meet a state legislator who cares about education; highlight education policies at the local level; look at a model of school reform at the state level; and read some suggestions for improving the next version of the ESEA or NCLB. Finally, organizations that provide good solid information about policy are listed for you to continue your own education on this important topic, so you can become an advocate for sound dropout prevention policies. We encourage you to join with the NDPC/N as we strive to both advocate and help develop those policies that will enable all students to succeed in school and in life.

A Conversation With A State Policymaker

Meet Stephen Canessa, member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives. Rep. Canessa's interest in education policy and its impact on dropout prevention was clear in this recent interview with the editor of the Newsletter.

Editor: When and why did you get involved in state government?

Rep. Canessa: I got involved with educational policy when I was a junior in college, getting elected to a school committee in my town, and I served for three years. As I was serving on the school committee, I decided to seek higher office, so when I was 24, I was out campaigning for state representative.

I was elected three years ago and, as a legislator, work on a variety of issues. I was very successful in a bill that involves gang violence and violence prevention. One of my communities is very impacted by that issue. We brought back some money to New Bedford to attack this issue on the local level. But another issue that I am keenly involved in is the issue of dropouts.

Editor: What particular issues related to dropouts are you focusing on?

Rep. Canessa: Students should not be allowed to drop out at age16. I think that age needs to be increased to 18 years old. New Hampshire just signed this into law, and it's part of a bill that I just filed along with Representative John Quinn from Dartmouth, MA. Our bill doesn't just increase the age from 16 to 18 over a given amount of time, but it also addresses other issues—such as creating a dropout prevention fund through the Department of Education, so they can find ways to address this issue with specific schools that may be more challenged by this issue than others.

We also want the idea of structured learning time to be addressed. Right now, students in Massachusetts have to spend 990 hours within a classroom each year. Many students participate in co-op or internship jobs—they leave school early to further their application of knowledge. We want this time to be counted as part of the structured learning time.

What I am finding as I talk with students is that many of them are bored. At some point, the students who drop out become disengaged and disinterested in whatever was taking place in that classroom. We need to make sure we challenge and engage those students—such examples like the middle college concept in North Carolina providing alternative opportunities.

We hope the ultimate outcome of this bill will be a decrease in the number of students who drop out of school and an increase in engagement by students who will choose to go on to postsecondary education.

Editor: Are you beginning to see connections between education and the broader goals of state government?

Rep. Canessa: Education is pivotal. You think about anything that is going to take place in our future—any sort of economic development, any sort of environmental preservation, any sort of health care initiatives—it requires folks to have a solid education.

Editor: How do we get all taxpayers to see the value of education and improving the graduation rate?

Rep. Canessa: That's really a challenge, but the best word to describe this situation is community. Whether a local, state, or national community, the success of that community is dependent on the success of our students and the support they receive, not only from their own family and friends, but from everyone in that community. We're all in this together.

Editor: Do you have some final thoughts?

Rep. Canessa: From my perspective as a legislator, we create policy, but there comes a point when you over-legislate education. There are some things we need to have in place, to raise the bar, to make education challenging and enjoyable. All the stakeholders need to realize that everyone is going to benefit—we are all in it together. And we need to share responsibility—parents, educators, administrators, legislators, and community members. All have a role to play.

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National Dropout Prevention Center/Network

NEWSLETTER

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Network Notes

Come to Louisville!!

Amazingly accessible….Louisville, Kentucky is within a day's drive of half of the nation's population. Plan to come to the 19th Annual National Dropout Prevention Network Conference, October 27-31, 2007, *Guiding All Students to the Winner's Circle: Rigor, Relevance, Relationships*. The Galt House Hotel and Suites is the conference headquarters for more than 150 sessions filled with information, inspiration, and cutting-edge research for those educators and community leaders who work with youth in at-risk situations.

A special feature of this year's conference is the GALA on Monday evening at the Muhammad Ali Center. Network with colleagues as you enjoy a taste of Louisville and tour this interactive museum of his living legacy. A value-added product to each registered participant is a DVD featuring the PowerPoints and handouts of this year's conference presenters.

Stephen Canessa

In this newsletter, State Representative Stephen R. Canessa of New Bedford, Massachusetts, shared some of his work as a policymaker on state issues related to dropout prevention. Rep. Canessa is a member of the Board of Directors of the National Dropout Prevention Network.

Steve's fervor for excellence in education began during high school when he was a mentor and tutor to younger high school students. He still believes that this is one of the best ways to individually enrich a child's education, which is why he continues to be a mentor to students today.

Steve holds a master's degree in Business Administration from Suffolk University's Sawyer School of Management. He also earned a bachelor's degree at Bridgewater State College where he graduated Summa Cum Laude.

NDPN Strategic Planning

As the Center/Network grows, and as the dropout crisis demands new and innovative approaches to solving this challenging epidemic, the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network is striving to evaluate our leadership role in the national, state, and local arenas.

At the request of the Board of Directors, the staff of the National Dropout Prevention Center are going through a strategic planning process. A refining of the Center/Network's mission statement, values, overarching goals, vision, and strategic goals will be reviewed by the Board over the next several months, with a major discussion on these to take place during the October Board meeting in Louisville.

The results of these discussions will be shared with Network members later this year.

About the Author

Meet Rob Shumer, author of the latest publication from the National Dropout Prevention Center, *Youth-Led Evaluation*. Robert Shumer, Ph.D., has been involved in service-learning and community-based programs for 37 years at the secondary and postsecondary levels. He is the founder and former director of the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse and former co-director of the Center for Experiential Education and Service-Learning at the University of Minnesota.

He currently consults with many states on evaluation of service/character/civic education programs, including youth-led evaluation.

Call for Presenters!

Need a warm get-away in January? Mark your calendar to come to beautiful Daytona Beach, FL, for the 2008 Effective Strategies Institute, *Get Moving Toward Victory Lane: Graduates Are Winners*, January 15-18, 2008, at the Hilton Daytona Beach Oceanfront Resort. The Institute is inviting innovative, skilled presenters to share in the areas of teenage parents, English language learners, youth in foster care, attendance, discipline, ESE and the GED exit option, truancy and teen court, faith-based initiatives, parental and community involvement, juvenile justice programs, migrant education, gangs, safe schools, technology and education, resource mapping, grant writing, and workforce education. If you would like to be considered as a presenter, please complete the online application on our Web site at www.dropoutprevention.org. Deadline for submission is September 28, 2007.

Risk Factors Report

A new study of the best research on dropout prevention shows that a single event rarely causes a child to drop out of school. Dropping out almost always is the result of a long process of disengagement that sometimes begins before the child enrolls in kindergarten.

Just as the reasons can be multiple, so are the solutions, according to a new study sponsored by Communities In Schools Inc. (CIS) and conducted with the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) at Clemson University.

The study, *Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs*, finds that dropping out of school is related to a variety of factors in four domains: individual, family, school, and community. The study focused on individual and family factors.

"There is no single risk factor that can accurately predict if a student will drop out, but there are 25 significant risk factors in the individual and family domains," said Jay Smink, executive director of the NDPC. "The more risk factors that become evident for a student, the greater the likelihood that student will eventually drop out of school."

The full report is available only on the NDPC/N Web site, www.dropoutprevention.org.

Policy Matters at the School Level

by Steven W. Edwards

A few days ago I visited an affluent school district, which boasts a high percentage of schools and students meeting AYP and a low percentage of students dropping out of school. During the course of my work there, I witnessed various educators having a heated discussion on instituting a new school attendance policy to improve student achievement at one school that currently falls short of state standards. A new attendance policy would, according to the arguments, raise standards, hold students responsible for their education, and increase student achievement. They believed that students would respond to the threat of failing one or more subjects due to excessive absences by attending more regularly.

However, I questioned the likelihood that this would, in fact, increase student achievement, or for that matter, even increase student attendance significantly. What did their data show? Who was excessively absent: the honors/college prep students or the students already in academic jeopardy? Most probably the latter, in which case implementing an attendance policy would likely result in greater academic failure. If a student missed 20 days of a course, he would fail that course and thus perpetuate his poor academic record and decrease his likelihood of graduating from high school.

Cynics might say that an attendance policy teaches students responsibility. They would argue that students bear the burden of getting themselves to school and should then pay the consequences if they miss. However, the fact remains that we still have to educate *all* our youth, not just the ones who follow the rules or who achieve in spite of any school policy or program in place. It does not help us educate all children by implementing a policy that is not needed to motivate high-achieving students and that only decreases motivation in and negatively impacts our most highly at-risk students. And is the purpose of the attendance policy to even teach responsibility? If so, how would we measure its success?

When considering school policies, educators also need to think long-term and consider all possible implications of these procedures.

Schools across the country wrestle with not only attendance policies, but many other policies and procedures as well. Hot topics include cell phones, security screening, Ipods, attendance, dress codes, ID badges, and athletic eligibility, to name a few. With any school policy or procedure, however, educators need to address a few key questions:

- Who are most school policies/rules written for?
- What is the impact of existing policies/rules on the most
- vulnerable students?
- Any policy should be looked at through the lens of the most at-risk student: How does or will the policy impact that child?
- What intervention/prevention strategies, techniques, or programs are in place to assist students who are not compliant with the policy or policies? What safety nets are in place?
- Are you willing and/or able to enforce the policy 100% of the time with 100% of the students?
- What data will be collected to show whether or not the policy/procedure is working and if it addresses the needs of those who it was intended to serve?

In addition to these questions, educators need to look at the long-term implications of all new and existing policies and procedures. For example, when a weapon incident occurs, many schools are quick to initiate various screening measures, including metal detectors. However, what are the long-term implications of such measures? How long will it take to screen each child coming into the building? Do these new measures even address the primary issues or solve the problem?

When considering school policies, educators also need to think long-term and consider all possible implications of these procedures. One school mandated that all students wear ID badges to school to increase school safety. If they did not have a badge on during first period, they were taken to the gym and sent home from school. Students who were high achieving for the most part complied with this new policy, but at-risk students who were suspended more frequently did not. An unintended but very damaging by-product of the ID badge policy was that these students were excluded from school, which negatively impacted their already tenuous academic performance. And was the school any safer? If faculty and staff knew their students, would there even be a need to wear ID badges?

Rather than looking at new rules and policies, I firmly believe that educators need to spend more time building a positive, collaborative school culture where students and adults have multiple opportunities for positive interactions daily. School policies need to be designed and reviewed to ensure that they support a positive school culture, rather than contribute to a punitive environment.

—Steven W. Edwards President
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EEDA: Promise or Peril?

by Sam F. Drew, Jr.

Our high schools were designed fifty years ago to meet the needs of another age. Until we design them to meet the needs of the 21st century, we will keep limiting—even ruining—the lives of millions of Americans every year.

—Bill Gates

Bill Gates' assessment of the status of our country's high schools, made to the nation's governors over two years ago, calls for comprehensive redesign to meet the needs of tomorrow's workforce. That workforce must be better educated to compete in a global and ever-changing economy if the United States is to maintain its economic leadership position. It follows that continuing to graduate roughly two-thirds of our students is no longer acceptable. Indeed, it is imperative today that our schools redesign in ways that assure all students will graduate highly prepared to enter the workforce or continue their education.

The redesign called for by Gates in our high schools must extend throughout the educational system. Changes are needed from preschool through higher education. Increasingly, Career Technology Education (CTE) is advancing models that are changing the way our schools and curriculum are structured and the way instruction is delivered. Primarily, the focus of CTE is on secondary education, but there are new efforts on the horizon that extend CTE components into the middle and elementary schools. Renewed interest in CTE for school reform and dropout prevention is again driving legislative educational policy in many states. The *South Carolina Education and Economic Development Act* (EEDA) is one such example.

For over a decade, the NDPC's list of evidenced-based strategies for dropout prevention has included Career Technology Education. Research is clear that students who have CTE program experiences are less likely to drop out of school.

Many attempts at school reform through legislative policy to date have fallen short of their mark. Previous school reform attempts based on CTE components fall into this category. These programs, such as South Carolina's *School-To-Work Act*, never transferred to the general curriculum and CTE coursework was "dumbed" down to replace existing vocational education coursework. We must learn from the shortcomings of past policy efforts and apply the lessons to new policy initiatives.

While several states are currently implementing career-focused education initiatives, South Carolina is the only state attempting to implement a policy, EEDA, of comprehensive statewide reform of education to integrate career awareness, preparation, and planning across the curriculum while maintaining high academic standards. The system includes a rare partnership between K-12 schools, businesses, and higher education working toward the same goal of preparing youth for today's economic realities and labor force requirements.

The EEDA is unique from other reform efforts in a number of ways, including the:

- attempt to implement a system spanning all schooling, from kindergarten through college, postsecondary career preparation, and entry into the labor force;
- focus on dropout prevention;
- attempt at whole school reform, using pathways to shape the entire high school curriculum;
- enhanced role of the school guidance counselor in career planning;
- extent of involvement of the business community in development and implementation;
- (emphasis on the role of parents in planning; and
- inclusion of all of these components in one initiative.

EEDA, as a statewide policy initiative, is unique in its comprehensive approach to school reform through CTE. This uniqueness also makes it vulnerable to a number of potential pitfalls. Primary among these, as was the case for *School-to-Work,* is whether it is run merely as a career and technology initiative and results in minimal impact on core curricula or reaches its full potential of true reform through the full contextualization of high school curriculum around career preparation and planning. Officials charged with overseeing the implementation of the Act are aware of this pitfall. It will be important to carefully monitor implementation of the EEDA in its early phases to ensure success.

It is the combination of promise and peril that makes the EEDA such a unique and vital statewide policy to track. If successful, this initiative could address important policy questions that would resonate nationwide in efforts to help prepare youth for today's and future economic realities.

—Sam F. Drew, Jr.
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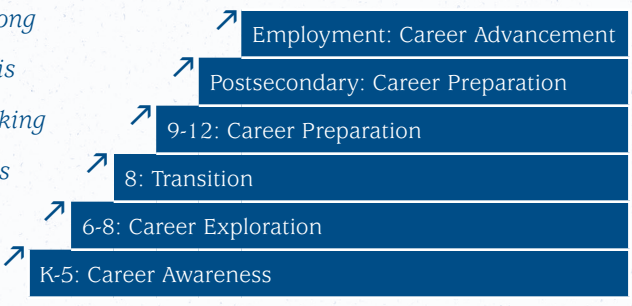
Every step along the Pathway is crucial to making each student's future a success.



Source: SC Department of Education

Resources

Education Commission of the States

■ The mission of the Education Commission of the States is to help states develop effective policy and practice for public education by providing data, research, analysis, and leadership; and by facilitating collaboration, the exchange of ideas among the states, and long-range strategic thinking.

ECS keeps policymakers on the leading edge of what's happening in the states by gathering, analyzing, and disseminating information about current and emerging issues, trends, and innovations in state education policy. Staff directors, policy analysts, and researchers work in conjunction with ECS constituents and education policymakers on today's most critical education issues.
www.ecs.org

American Youth Policy Forum

■ AYPF's mission is to broaden the awareness and understanding of policymakers and to strengthen the youth policymaking process by bridging policy, practice, and research. They do this by identifying the most pertinent high-quality information on youth issues available and providing a forum for prominent leaders in government, programming, and research, as well as the youth themselves, to share their viewpoints and expertise about the policies and practices that improve outcomes for all youth.

AYPF focuses on three overlapping themes: Education, Youth Development and Community Involvement, and Preparation for Careers and Workforce Development. AYPF publishes a variety of nationally disseminated youth policy reports and materials.
www.aypf.org

National School Boards Association

The National School Boards Association is a not-for-profit Federation of state associations of school boards across the United States. Its mission is to foster excellence and equity in public education through school board leadership. NSBA achieves that mission by representing the school board perspective before federal government agencies and with national organizations that affect education, and by providing vital information and services to state associations of school boards and local school boards throughout the nation.

NSBA advocates local school boards as the ultimate expression of grassroots democracy. NSBA supports the capacity of each school board—acting on behalf of and in close concert with the people of its community—to envision the future of education in its community, to establish a structure and environment that allow all students to reach their maximum potential, to provide accountability for the community on performance in the schools, and to serve as the key community advocate for children and youth and their public schools.
www.nsba.org

Education Policy Analysis Archives

■ *Education Policy Analysis Archives* is a peer-reviewed journal published by the Mary Lou Fulton College of Education, Arizona State University, and the College of Education, University of South Florida. *EPAA* welcomes submitted articles for consideration for publication. Articles should deal with education policy in any of its many aspects, and may focus at any level of the education system in any nation. Articles may be written in either English or Spanish or both languages.
http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/

The Center for Research in Educational Policy

■ The mission of the Center for Research in Educational Policy is to implement a research agenda associated with educational policies and practices in preK-12 public schools and to provide a knowledge base for use by educational practitioners and policymakers. Research outcomes are intended to not only describe the complexities of educational phenomena but also offer recommendations for action.
http://crep.memphis.edu/

Alliance for Excellent Education

■ The mission of the Alliance for Excellent Education is to promote high school transformation to make it possible for every child to graduate prepared for postsecondary education and success in life.

The Alliance is a national policy, research, and advocacy organization acting on behalf of millions of at-risk, low-performing secondary school students. They work to develop a national consensus and policy agenda that will make it possible for all students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life. To do this, the Alliance serves as an advocate for relevant government policies to ensure resources are targeted to at-risk students in middle school and high school. They partner with business, research, education, and other organizations to build consensus and inform the public. They recommend specific strategies that can and should be used to support excellence. In addition, the Alliance is building a national network of Allies for Education to take on the cause, amplify their messages, and create a drumbeat of support for concerted action.
www.all4ed.org/

Events

October 3-5, 2007 Atlanta, GA
National Conference on Preventing Crime, *Helping Build Safer Communities,* National Crime Prevention Council
www.ncpc.org/

October 27-31, 2007 Louisville, KY
19th Annual National Dropout Prevention Network Conference, *Guiding ALL Students to the Winner's Circle: Rigor, Relevance, Relationships*
www.dropoutprevention.org

Nov. 11-13, 2007 St. Louis, MO
15th Annual National Quality Education Conference
http://nqec.asq.org/

The Reauthorization of NCLB

Students With Disabilities

by Sandra Covington-Smith and Antonis Katsiyannis

The *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)* now commonly known as *The No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) was reauthorized in 2001. The purpose of this act is to ensure that students get a quality education regardless of social or economic status, race or ethnicity, language, and/or cognitive ability. This legislation has received criticism from many professionals regarding its business approach to education issues, excessive reliance on standardized tests, and overall inflexibility regarding student progress affecting both special and general education.

NCLB established the 2013-2014 school year as the deadline for public schools to ensure that all students are proficient in reading and math. IDEA, in line with the increased emphasis on outcomes, emphasized the substantive requirements of the special education process and aligned itself with NCLB's provisions such as adequate yearly progress (AYP), highly qualified personnel, and evidence-based practices.

Schools are also required to report AYP data for all students as well as by subgroup—students who are economically disadvantaged, students from racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, or students with limited English proficiency.

Most students with disabilities are to be held to grade level standards although in some situations, accommodations, modifications, or alternate assessments may be used. NCLB puts a cap on students who may take an alternative assessment and be counted as scoring proficient for purposes of determining AYP. Although there is considerable controversy on the appropriateness of expecting the great majority of students with disabilities to meet standards set for all students, accountability for improved outcomes necessitates meaningful and effective programs using scientifically-based educational interventions.

NCLB, due to be reauthorized this year, is expected to provide schools with more flexibility and fairness. Originally, ESEA was recognized as a landmark law in securing social, political, and economic equality across race and class and was designed to supplement educational opportunity for poor children. Similarly, NCLB should continue this focus on equity for all students by requiring and adequately supporting the educational performance and academic achievement of all students, including students with disabilities.

—Sandra Covington-Smith, sandras@clemson.edu
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Community-Based, Integrated Student Services

by Bob Seidel

Making significant progress on the school dropout crisis will require multiple, coordinated strategies. Current federal education policy emphasizes accountability, professional development, improved management and pedagogy, and supplemental academic services. But these strategies do not address nonacademic needs of the most vulnerable students. Excellent teachers, curriculum, administration, and high standards will not in themselves do what's needed. They will not feed hungry children or provide eyeglasses or positive role models to those in need. Such "extracurricular" issues are so pervasive—and debilitating to learning—that they undermine our huge investment in education governance and pedagogy.

Yet resources to address these needs exist in our communities. We generally don't need to create them from scratch. We do, however, need to make them conveniently accessible to students where they are—in school—in an efficient, user-friendly way. Community-based, integrated student services (CBISS) improve student achievement by connecting community resources.

Effective and efficient delivery of CBISS depends on the presence of staff in schools dedicated to identifying and matching student needs and community resources—a single contact point for students and families. In hundreds of communities across the country, trained coordinators already work within schools to assess individual students' needs and connect those students with relevant community resources. Research shows that CBISS are effective components of school-based efforts to improve student attendance, reduce behavior incidents, reduce suspensions, improve academic achievement, increase next grade promotions, reduce dropouts, and increase graduation rates.

Why should the federal government get involved in this? Without additional assistance, too few schools have the resources to offer such programs.

In the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, Congress and the President should:

- provide competitive grant funding to community-based, nonprofit organizations to work with schools and school districts to provide integrated, school-based services to at-risk students;
- require that schools not meeting state performance goals evaluate and, as appropriate, pursue a strategy of delivering CBISS to students who need them; and
- fund national initiatives to guide this strategy using research- and evidence-based criteria supporting provision of CBISS. Such initiatives should combine research, evaluation, training, and technical assistance.

—Bob Seidel, Director, Government Resources, Communities In Schools, Inc. seidelb@cisnet.org

Viewpoint

Never underestimate the potential positive impact of a well-developed and well-implemented policy. Schools struggle to design and implement successful interventions and strategies to reduce the dropout rate, but policy is often an afterthought, viewed negatively or worse yet, is not considered at all.

Policy? Why policy? We encourage advocates for prevention and intervention strategies to consider policy as a critical process to *ensure sustainability of successful practice.* Policy provides support and accountability structures to ensure quality strategies are successfully integrated and sustained in districts and schools.

Recent research provides information on (1) why students drop out, (2) predictors of students at risk of dropping out, (3) effective practices, and (4) necessary collaborations between schools and others to reverse the dropout trend. This information assists practitioners to identify and provide assistance to students who are at risk of dropping out. This information should also be utilized to inform policymakers as they develop systems to collect and report dropout data for different groups of students; create policies intended to reduce excessive absenteeism; and support initiatives and programs delivering special assistance for particular groups of students, such as teen parents, children of migrant workers, and children whose native language is not English.

Advocates for effective education programs that engage students and reduce dropouts should develop a policy agenda by (1) reviewing current policies at the state and district levels to understand what systems are in place to support students; (2) identifying gaps in the set of policies that need to be addressed; (3) identifying existing policies that are impediments to implementing the most effective strategies for dropout prevention; and (4) creating a set of quality policy options for policymakers and education leaders to consider, adopt, or adapt.

Examples of some recently-enacted state policies include:

- The Mississippi legislature recently created the Office of Dropout Prevention in the State Department of Education and is requiring each district to implement a dropout prevention program by the 2008-09 school year.
- The Virginia legislature passed a resolution requesting that the state board of education study high school dropout and graduation rates and develop policy recommendations.

It is not sufficient to care about our students; it is not sufficient to create programs that engage students in their education and better connect them to their schools and learning; it is not sufficient to create a set of expectations for education stakeholders; and it is not sufficient to collect information on dropouts. In addition to these important strategies, we need a set of policies that provide high levels of support for effective programs, professional development for practitioners, and sustainable collaborations with community agencies. If we combine effective practice and supportive policies we stand a better chance to reverse the current dropout rate and provide quality education for all students.

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The purpose of Viewpoint is to allow professionals to express their opinions about issues related to dropout prevention. The opinions expressed by these authors do not necessarily reflect those of the National Dropout Prevention Network.

National Dropout Prevention Center/Network
NEWSLETTER
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