

**Dropout Recovery Program – Reengaging the Disengaged**

**Maria Cuzzocreo, MAED  
Director of Instruction, Grad Solutions, LLC  
1440 S. Clearview Drive, Suite 101  
Mesa, AZ 85209**

**maria@iwantmydiploma.com**

**(623) 882-6353**

**Iwantmydiploma.com**

***Key words:*** Dropout Recovery Program; Grad Solutions

**Funding Sources:**

State legislation (see Appendix A) designates that an Educational Management Organization (EMO) can provide dropout recovery services (DPR) for a school or district. Average daily membership for students enrolled in a DRP depends on the specific state.

Schools/LEA's and EMO agree on a percent split of the per student funding per month.

**Project Cost and Budget Narrative:**

-Mentors (1 mentor per 100 students): \$28,000 – \$40,000/year

-Highly qualified teachers of record (1:100 student / teacher ratio): contracted \$25/hour

-LMS (Learning Management System curriculum): \*Edgenuity license \$25,000/year

-IT services

-State mandated testing costs

-Administrative costs: enrollments/registrar, credit check, Learning Plan, etc.

**Project Description:** Due to state legislation, Section 15-901.06 (Appendix A), Grad Solutions was created to partner with schools and districts to provide dropout recovery and prevention services that focus on removing the barriers that are keeping students from getting their high school diploma. Grad Solutions offers flexibility in school schedules (no seat time requirement and online format), a curriculum that is content/mastery based (pretesting; mastering content at your own pace and moving on), and mentoring. Students are referred to Grad Solutions by schools which they previously attended (or community outreach) when they are credit deficient and are not expected to graduate with their cohort. Grad Solutions enrolls the students, assigns each student a mentor, reviews credits previously earned and determines credits still needed, and then develops a Learning Plan for each student. Because Grad Solutions uses an on-line curriculum, LMS, students complete their remaining credits at their own pace and on their own schedule, 24/7. Mentors are in daily/weekly contact with their students to encourage them and offer needed resources.

**Staffing Pattern:** Staffing is scalable based on student enrollment numbers (ie: more students, more mentors and teachers are hired).

**Population Served:** Students who are 16-22 years of age who have dropped out of high school and have disengaged from education.

**Project Origination:** This project evolved based on the need for an alternative to “alternative schools” which require seat time in order for students to complete their high school requirements. Once legislation went into effect in 2012, Grad Solutions partnered with Eastpointe Charter to begin enrolling students into a dropout recovery program. Due to the fact that approximately 18,000 students per year drop out of Arizona high schools, this population needed a program that could help remove barriers that keep students from completing high school.

**Issues Addressed:** Funding from the Arizona Department of Education was an issue for the first two years of the program. Wording in the legislation was interpreted differently by stakeholders and issues arose. School districts were unwilling to think outside the box in order to meet the needs of this at-risk population. Grad Solutions has attempted to partner with local districts as a contracted EMO but nothing has come to fruition. Districts would rather refer students to Grad

Solutions rather than partnering with an EMO to provide dropout recovery and prevention services.

Legislation requires that the final transcript and diploma for a student that has graduated from a DRP has to be created by the LEA (charter or public school). Collaboration between both administrative teams must occur in order to produce a students' final high school transcript and diploma.

**Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:**

To engage as many disengaged students within Arizona; Students' GPA will increase due to a minimum threshold that is set within the LMS, Edgenuity; Students complete a minimum amount of credits per school year (average of credits earned yearly previously); Students earn their high school diploma by the end of their Learning Plan.

**Results (Outcomes and Achievements):**

1700 + disengaged students are now engaged; 500+ students have earned their diplomas since inception of the program.

**Project Timeline:**

2012 – ongoing.

**Outcomes Related to School Completion, Dropout Prevention, and/or Graduation Rates:**

Arizona schools are referring students who are at-risk and in the process of dropping out will decrease the Arizona dropout rate and more students earning their high school diplomas.

**Current Status of Project:**

Currently, Grad Solutions has re-engaged over 1700 students that were not engaged in an Arizona high school. Grad Solutions has over 20 mentors, 10 Orientation Counselors, 30 contracted highly qualified teachers, 6 Directors, and a CEO. Grad Solutions participate in state testing twice a year and follow the guidelines set forth by the LEA with which we are partnered.

**Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant:**

Originally, I was an alternative high school educator. Throughout my career, I continued to watch students “fall through the cracks” because public/charter schools were not equipped to effectively serve the at-risk student population. For this reason, I chose to leave the public-school environment in order to become the Director of Instruction for Grad Solutions which is now the EMO for three Arizona charter schools and have enrolled over 1700 students state-wide.

**Lessons Learned:**

People who write legislation for education need to be part of the education arena.

**Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:**

Remain abreast of legislation that addresses Dropout Prevent/Recovery Programs for LEAs. Mentors are key to the success of this program as they create and maintain relationships with the students. These relationships, in turn, aid the students in making progress toward achieving their high school diploma.