Objective

To provide comprehensive, individualized plans for recovered dropouts and a mechanism for ensuring consistent and sustained follow-up.

State of Practice

According to the statewide survey, only 8.4 percent of districts and charter schools that have dropout recovery programs provide a formal case management approach for recovered students, although many of the schools and districts contacted for interviews indicated that they utilize such an approach informally.

Promising National or Other State Practices

The case management approach allows coordination of services at intake (Weiler 1994, Harris 2006) and also ensures follow-up (Woods 1995).

Who Is Involved

Staff involved in case management will vary somewhat depending on whether dropout recovery efforts are organized at the district level or at the school level. In some large districts, district-level staff maintain case files and follow up on every student recovered back into school, often with the assistance of site-based staff including principals, counselors, and instructional coaches. In some cases, particularly in smaller districts, student case files are maintained at the school level, either by the principal, the counselor, or administrative staff. In general, the availability of staff resources and the proximity to the student population should be considered in selecting a centralized versus local case management approach.

Process

The following steps are recommended for all districts and schools. However, the steps may be modified to best fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

Create an intake form/folder that specifies both academic and social supports needed for each student. This should include, at a minimum:
Academic data;

Attendance data;

Disciplinary data;

Pregnancy/parental status;

Housing status;

Transportation needs;

Economic/job issues.

Commit to

- Assign responsibility for consistent and sustained student follow-up to a staff member—whether at the district level or school level—and develop a schedule for reviewing each student's case file as often as necessary.

- Maintain a case file for each recovered student in a centralized location that is regularly updated with academic and personal information.

- Ensure that the staff member assigned to follow-up on the student's progress does so according to the specified schedule and addresses academic and social issues in a timely manner.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and schools reporting "promising practice" in this area and the literature review, the following strategies have been particularly promising in using a case management approach to successfully re-enroll and serve dropouts:

Strategy 1: Ensure that *all* factors contributing to the student dropping out of school are addressed in the initial student plan and that staff assigned to assist recovered dropouts have knowledge of and access to services outside of the educational arena (e.g., healthcare, housing, childcare, and other social services). (Examples B, C)
Strategy 2: Create a centralized repository for student case files so that institutional memory is preserved. (Example A)
Strategy 3: Ensure that follow up is personalized and sustained over time. (Examples A, B)
Strategy 4: Actively cultivate positive relationships between case managers (or district or school recovery staff) and school staff to ensure that recovered students' transition back into school is a positive one. (Examples A, B)

Supporting Examples

Example A: Katy ISD
Tier 3 District, Large District (51,201+ students)

Katy ISD employs two district-level staff members to lead dropout recovery efforts, as well as academic coaches on three of their campuses who are charged with following up on recovered students.

District staff open case files on all dropouts and recovered dropouts. According to district staff, there is a "24-hour rule" whereby any student that drops out (identified through any means, including leaver reports, school staff, parents, peers, or others) gets a phone call within 24-hours of district staff being notified.

District staff pull all available records (e.g., academic, disciplinary, and attendance records, as well as family contact information and any available socio-cultural information (e.g., language issues, pregnancy or parenting status, homelessness or housing status, etc.) from district computer files. Prior to speaking with the dropout or his/her family, district staff carefully analyze student records to come up with an individualized "game plan" for that student based on the specific challenges the student has at the time. Next, a district staff member contacts the student or his/her parents and listens carefully to what the student and parent feels about why the student dropped out and what outcome they would like to pursue.

Based on all of the information available from school records and student/parent discussions, district staff create a plan of action that may include recovery into the student's home school, recovery into the district's "school of choice" (alternative education program), an online credit recovery program located at the student's home school, or another alternative outside the school district altogether (such as Job Corps, community colleges, GED Programs, charter schools, or private schools). If a student is not recovered back into the school district, district staff continue to contact the student to determine whether he/she pursued the options they discussed and to ensure that the student knows it is never too late to return to one of the district's completion options.

If a student is recovered back into the home school (either as a full-time student or using credit recovery), or into the district's alternative program, district staff prepare (documentation to clear) the school registrar for the return of the student, so that the recovered student does not experience any barriers to re-enrollment.

Once the student is re-enrolled, the academic coach takes over student monitoring. However, district level staff monitor the work of the academic coaches closely to ensure each student is receiving appropriate services and is on the "right track" to graduation. District staff continue to maintain student case files to ensure that all records pertaining to the student (including logs of any communication with or about the student) are kept in a centralized location.

In addition, district staff continue to intervene with school staff if needed to ensure that recovered dropouts' needs are being met.

According to district staff, the centralization of monitoring is overwhelming, but critical. First, by maintaining all student case files at the district, the staff can be certain of each student's status at any given time. In addition, it is important to demonstrate from the top down that every case is important and that personalization of services is critical. Also, this detailed case management approach builds institutional memory, ensuring that students' progress will be easily apparent to any new staff coming into the program and that monitoring of progress will be consistent over time.

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65