



EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES & SERVICES FOR GRADUATION IMPROVEMENT

Since the 1980s, the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) has been a nationwide leader in helping school systems prevent student dropouts and increase graduation rates. At the heart of our mission is the Effective Strategies & Services for Graduation Improvement, a set of research-backed best practices that help schools build supportive cultures to ensure the success of all students. NDPC uses the Effective Strategies & Services to guide the many ways we partner with schools, including offering tailored professional learning experiences, supporting alternative learning education, hosting rigorous Attendance and Diploma Planning Institutes, and facilitating the National Dropout Prevention and Trauma-Skilled Schools™ certification programs.

The following domains describe the Effective Strategies & Services we see in school systems that proactively and positively impact their graduation rates.



**Share Collective
Responsibility for All Students**



**Enhance Instructional
Engagement Strategies**



**Build Supportive
Networks for All Students**



**Offer High-Impact
Learning Pathways**

SPN

Successful
Practices
Network



NATIONAL
DROPOUT
PREVENTION
CENTER

DOMAIN 1: SHARE COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL STUDENTS



Build a culture where every student matters—and every adult owns the outcome. Schools that improve graduation rates don't leave student success to chance or to a single role. They create a shared responsibility across staff, leadership, and systems.

Domain Indicators



Offer systemic and student-centered professional learning

School leaders provide ongoing, sustained professional learning that is specifically directed at improving graduation outcomes. Learning experiences cover multiple factors that impact graduation rates, including understanding the impact of trauma on students, improving attendance, and implementing engaging instructional practices.



Create intentional staff, leadership, and school culture

Schools create an environment in which every staff member understands and owns the importance of supporting every student's opportunity to graduate. This dedication fosters a mutual sense of connection and belonging between students and staff, ensuring that the school community is both safe and supportive for all students.



Employ data to find root causes and develop solutions

Schools implement a systemic approach to clinical investigation, utilizing attendance, behavior, and course completion data to guide interventions. By monitoring these key dropout predictors, leadership teams can make informed, proactive decisions that support student resilience and overall school success.

KEY RESEARCH & ACTION STEPS

Collective Efficacy Matters

Research shows that when staff share ownership of at-risk student outcomes, student progression increases at nearly four times the average rate.

Action Focus

Form cross-functional data teams to diagnose root causes behind attendance, behavioral incidents, and credit deficits rather than relying on reactive fixes.

Belonging Drives Completion

A one-point increase on a five-point school belonging scale is linked to a 3.4 percentage-point increase in four-year graduation rates.

Attendance as an Early Warning

Ninth graders with four or fewer absences graduate at an 87% rate, compared to just 21% for those missing 15 or more days.

DOMAIN 2: BUILD SUPPORTIVE NETWORKS FOR ALL STUDENTS



Strengthen the relationships and school-supported opportunities, programs, and extracurricular activities that make school matter to students. If students want to be at school, feel like the adults in the community care about them, and see pathways to future success beyond graduation, their engagement with their school community increases.

Domain Indicators



Build family & caregiver partnerships

Schools establish family and caregiver partnerships rooted in authentic relationships. These partnerships empower families to positively influence student motivation, encourage student interests, and contribute to fortifying student resilience, creating a unified, two-way support system that bridges the space between home and school.



Invest in programs that build relationships and resilience

School communities create strategic opportunities for students to connect with caring adults, their peers, and their local communities to better contextualize their possible futures. High-impact programs like mentoring, after-school opportunities, and service-learning foster resilience by providing students with a sense of purpose and a broader network of support that extends beyond the traditional school day.

KEY RESEARCH & ACTION STEPS

The Power of Mentoring

Students paired in structured mentoring relationships see a 7% increase in the likelihood of graduation for each additional month they stay connected.

Authentic Family Buy-In

Strong, two-way family partnerships consistently lower dropout rates and improve academic performance across all student demographics.

Extended Learning Reinforcement

High-quality after-school and summer learning programs reverse academic loss, reduce unexcused absences, and reinforce credit recovery.

Action Focus

Embed service-learning and peer connection models that help students build practical resilience, self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging in the community.

DOMAIN 3: ENHANCE INSTRUCTIONAL ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES



Make learning relevant, engaging, and connected to students' lives. Dynamic instruction plays a direct role in whether students stay engaged or check out. Schools that improve outcomes prioritize how students experience learning every day.

Domain Indicators



Champion rigorous and relevant instructional strategies

Educators are empowered by their administrators to employ instructional strategies grounded in the neuroscience of learning and that focus on offering students rigorous and relevant learning experiences. This increases student engagement, transforming classrooms into dynamic spaces designed to captivate students and stoke their curiosity.



Develop personalized learning opportunities

Educators adopt individualized instructional practices that allow students to see their own experiences, interests, and identities reflected in their learning. This student-centered instruction fosters a stronger sense of relevance, ensuring every learner understands how their education connects to their unique personal goals and future opportunities.



Deploy intentional technology solutions

Districts deploy appropriate technology solutions—including artificial intelligence fluency and virtual learning pathways—specifically designed to engage at-risk learners. These tools provide flexible options for credit recovery and high-engagement experiences, preparing students with the digital literacy required for the modern workforce.

KEY RESEARCH & ACTION STEPS

Rigor & Relevance Boost Retention

Restructuring classroom instruction around real-world problem solving and high cognitive challenge's directly increases persistence, GPA, and on-time graduation.

Action Focus

Shift classrooms from passive listening to dynamic, curiosity-driven spaces where coursework is visibly tied to future opportunities.

Personalized Support Returns

Individualized learning frameworks that reflect student identities and goals yield measurable gains in persistence and a 5.2% lift in graduation rates.

Intentional Technology

Digital tools and AI analytics can predict graduation risk's early and provide flexible credit recovery without replacing human instruction.

DOMAIN 4: OFFER HIGH-IMPACT LEARNING PATHWAYS



Give students clear, relevant paths to graduation and beyond. Offering varied pathways allows learners to prepare for college, career and job readiness, or military service to match the specific needs, goals, and skills of every student. Students are more likely to persist when they see a direct connection between school and their future.

Domain Indicators



Cultivate CTE programs and career-connected learning experiences

Schools build robust Career Technical Education (CTE) programs and integrate career-connected learning experiences that align academic work with future employment. By offering opportunities like earning micro-credentials and participating in industry partnerships, these options provide students with the tangible motivation and career-ready skills necessary for long-term economic mobility.



Support quality alternative learning programs

Districts invest in high-quality alternative programs that ensure students receive personalized attention, flexible scheduling, and effective credit recovery opportunities. These programs hire and support a high-quality staff and deploy specialized frameworks to provide scaffolded paths for students at the greatest risk of dropping out to achieve their high school diplomas.

KEY RESEARCH & ACTION STEPS

CTE as a Retention Driver

Career Technical Education concentration is the single most impactful dropout prevention strategy, increasing graduation odds by 7 to 21 percentage points.

Flexible Alternative Frameworks

High-performing alternative programs achieve 70% to 83% graduation rates by providing smaller learning cohorts, flexible schedules, and targeted credit recovery.

Credit-by-Credit Persistence

Every additional career-technical credit earned directly lowers a student's statistical probability of dropping out.

Action Focus

Expand industry micro-credentials and redesign alternative learning spaces to prioritize personal support, mental well-being, and vocational relevance.

PUT THE EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES TO WORK IN YOUR SCHOOLS

PARTNER WITH SPN | NDPC

Adopting effective strategies is only the starting point. Sustainable gains in graduation rates happen when district leadership, school teams, and community partners align around clear data, shared ownership, and consistent execution.

HOW WE CAN WORK TOGETHER

- **Data-Informed Action Planning:** Diagnostic root-cause audits that convert local attendance, behavioral, and course completion metrics into focused graduation plans.
- **Attendance & Diploma Planning Institutes:** Hands-on team institutes that shift chronic absenteeism from routine compliance to a measurable retention lever.
- **Trauma-Skilled Schools™ Certification:** Whole-staff professional learning that equips teachers and administrators with concrete Tier 1 de-escalation, resilience, and classroom engagement strategies.
- **Alternative Learning & CTE Optimization:** Strategic program redesign to ensure nontraditional, credit-recovery, and career-technical pathways deliver verified graduation outcomes.

THE SPN DIFFERENCE

For nearly four decades, NDPC has supported schools, districts, and states in improving graduation outcomes through research-informed, systems-based strategies.

Our work is

- Research-informed
- Systems-based
- Instructionally grounded
- Designed for sustainability
- Focused on measurable outcomes

We do not provide checklists.
We build capacity.



READY TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP?

Let's discuss how we can help your schools build a culture of resilience where students stay engaged and reach graduation.

Scan the QR Code or visit <https://bit.ly/4rEkL5S>

You can also Connect with our Team

 (518) 723-2063

 www.DropoutPrevention.org



20 Prospect Street,
Ballston Spa, NY 12020