Partners in Prevention: The Role of School-Community Partnerships in Dropout Prevention
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The Report of the NASBE Study Group on School-Community Partnerships
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Study Group Members

Thomas Brewster, Chair – VA
Stan Archie – MO
Laurel Brown – UT
T. Willard Fair – FL
Karin Forbes – RI
Vinni Hall – IL
Theresa Hopkins-Staten – CT
Kandy Imes – NE
Mary Lord – DC
Gayle Manchin – WV
Tammie McDaniel – LA
Michael Pettibone – IN
Brigitte Ramsey – KY
Anthony South – MD
Diane Sumpter – SC
Rebecca Valdez - NE

Presenters to the Study Group

January 2009

Joyce Epstein, Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships
Charles Hiteshew, America’s Promise Alliance
Molly McCloskey, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Susan Richards, Robert Seidel, Susan Seidel, and Suki Steinhauser, Communities in Schools

March 2009

Deidre Anderson, National Student Assistance Program
Martin Blank, Institute for Educational Leadership
Jeanne Contardo, Business-Higher Education Forum
Steve Edwards, Edwards Educational Services
Kavita Gilchrist, Computers for Youth
Merita Irby, Forum for Youth Investment
Melissa McQuarrie, Virginia Beach Public Schools

Becky Smerdon, Academy for Educational Development

June 2009

Kevin Days, Learn and Serve America
Peter Eldridge, 21st Century Community Learning Centers
Bobby Huntley, Virginia Beach Central Academy High School
Phillip Jackson, The Black Star Project
Anthony Kissik, National Guard
Jacqueline Massey, Academy for College and Career Exploration
John Vanderbleek, Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps
Jack Wuest, Alternative Schools Network
The Armstrong, Harris, and Schneider Families, Virginia Students and Their Families

NASBE Staff

Yen Chau, Project Director
Dia Adams, Project Associate
Chris Sun, Project Associate
David Kysilko, Director of Publications

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For more information about NASBE’s work in school-community partnerships and dropout prevention, contact Dr. Yen Chau at 703-684-4000 or yenc@nasbe.org.
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Summary Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1:
Leverage the role of the state board of education to promote the importance of school-community partnerships as part of a comprehensive dropout prevention plan.

The state board of education can do this by being:

a. **Convener and Conveyer:** State boards can create a communication plan to inform students, parents, other stakeholders, department of education staff, districts, and schools on community and education issues and how each of these individuals and entities can be involved.

b. **Developer:** State boards can lead by example as they develop and facilitate partnerships, as well as support local collaborations that connect state-level policymakers to workforce development, higher education, families, and the community at-large. Another role state leaders can play is to develop partnerships or be a part of a collaborative effort with student groups, families, and the community to address education issues, including the dropout problem in their state.

c. **Financer:** State boards can promote partnerships and dropout prevention initiatives by providing small grants to schools and districts or making sure currently available resources are allocated appropriately.

d. **Policymaker:** State boards can use their role as policymakers to examine current policies and ensure they encourage, support, and sustain best practice models of school-community partnerships and dropout prevention. These policies can provide districts and schools with the necessary framework, capacity, and resources to support and sustain best practice models. Policies that hinder this development would be removed and, if needed, new policies would be developed.

RECOMMENDATION 2:
Create a systemic, comprehensive education framework around an inclusive vision for student success that includes partnerships across programs and with families and the broader community.

RECOMMENDATION 3:
Develop a longitudinal, comprehensive data system that includes students’ academic, behavioral, and health data that can provide real-time information and flag students at risk of dropping out. The data system should also include services and programs that the student and school are involved in.

RECOMMENDATION 4:
Provide districts and schools with the necessary training, professional development, technical assistance, and information on best practice models to ensure the ability of leaders and staff to develop and sustain school-community partnerships and dropout prevention plans.

RECOMMENDATION 5:
Create multiple pathways to graduation and opportunities to gain and apply knowledge and skills (e.g., through service learning or career technical courses) that will require strategic school-community partnerships.
Introduction

Baltimore’s nine neighborhood high schools serve some of the most at-risk students in the city. About half receive free or reduced-price meals, face overwhelming challenges, and reside in communities plagued by high poverty, weakened family units, substance abuse, and violence. Sixty-four percent of the students have missed more than 20 days of school, and overall, the schools lose about 70 percent of their student population between the 9th and 12th grades.

In response, the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS), along with the Mayor’s office, Johns Hopkins University, and the Office of Workforce Development, developed The Blueprint for Baltimore’s Neighborhood High Schools (Blueprint) in 1999. The Blueprint provides the framework to turn around these schools through a focus on strong academic rigor, small support structures, and effective, accountable instruction and leadership. And very significantly, the strategic plan of each school builds upon the unique character, qualities, and resources of the city, as well as each individual community. In other words, the plans are not just about what goes on inside the schools, but about the interplay and relationships developed between the schools and their surrounding communities.

Efforts from the Blueprint appear to be having a positive effect on the schools’ social and academic environments. A recent study found that students and teachers felt more positive about safety, personalization, and administrative leadership over time at their neighborhood schools.

The Blueprint in Baltimore is not unique. States, cities, and communities across the country are going through a similar process. Many schools today, like the ones in Baltimore, are breaking down the walls of an education system that was built more than 200 years ago and is no longer applicable today. Today’s society is global, multicultural, multilingual, and digitally connected. Learning no longer occurs just in the classroom, delivered by teachers. At the same time, research has repeatedly shown that no single strategy or approach will turn around low-performing schools and reengage students. As a result, districts and schools are reaching out to the community to aid them in the education and support of these youths, especially dur-
ing economically difficult times. Business and community leaders in turn are working with districts and schools to develop an educated workforce that will compete for tomorrow’s jobs. Thus, these strategic partnerships between schools and the community are not only about increasing the capacity of our districts and schools. More fundamentally, they help prepare students for postsecondary college or workforce and the 21st century.

Responding to these issues, in 2009 the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) convened a study group to examine the dropout crisis and discuss how school-community partnerships is a critical strategy within a systemic, comprehensive model to combat the crisis. Although partnerships are most often conducted at the school and district level, state leaders can leverage their role to provide support and infrastructure, create policies, lead by example, and use their bully pulpit to support school-community partnerships while highlighting the urgent need to address the dropout crisis.

The purpose of this report is to:

1) Provide an overview of the dropout crisis;

2) Discuss school-community partnerships as an evidence-supported strategy within a systemic, comprehensive model to combat the crisis;

3) Issues and challenges to consider in developing partnerships; and

4) Provide state-level recommendations for developing best practice model partnerships, including:

- Leveraging the role of the state board of education to highlight and elevate the urgency to reduce the dropout crisis and prepare students to be globally competitive.

- Creating a systemic, comprehensive framework around an inclusive vision for student success that includes partnerships across programs and with families and the broader community.

- Developing a longitudinal, comprehensive data system that includes student’s academic, behavioral, and health data that could provide real-time information and flag students at risk of dropping out. The data system should also include services and programs that the student and school is involved in.

- Providing districts and schools with the necessary training, professional development and technical assistance and information on best practice models of school-community partnerships and dropout prevention.

- Creating multiple pathways to graduation, this includes allowing students to earn credits for workforce development. These courses could also earn students an industry certification if they pass and meet all requirements.
1. Overview of the Dropout Crisis

“And no matter what you want to do with your life, I guarantee that you’ll need an education to do it. You want to be a doctor, or a teacher, or a police officer? You want to be a nurse or an architect, a lawyer or a member of our military? You’re going to need a good education for every single one of those careers. You cannot drop out of school and just drop into a good job. You’ve got to train for it and work for it and learn for it.

“And this isn’t just important for your own life and your own future. What you make of your education will decide nothing less than the future of this country. The future of America depends on you. What you’re learning in school today will determine whether we as a nation can meet our greatest challenges in the future.

“We need every single one of you to develop your talents and your skills and your intellect so you can help us old folks solve our most difficult problems. If you don’t do that—if you quit on school—you’re not just quitting on yourself, you’re quitting on your country.”

— President Barack Obama

Every day across America, hundreds of students quit school. Countless others show up, but are no longer engaged in their own education. And many who do complete high school leave with insufficient knowledge and skills for higher education, workforce, or the military. This represents not only a waste of taxpayers’ investment in public education, but a tragic squandering of our country’s “human capital.” The national statistics on high school completion are bleak:

- Approximately one in three students will drop out of school;
- Graduation rates in the United States have remained unchanged for the past 30 years;
• 50 percent of African American and Hispanic students fail to graduate on time;
• Only 15 percent of high schools produce close to half the nation’s dropouts. Such figures highlight the disparities in outcomes between students in wealthy and those in poor communities.4

For those who do drop out of high school, the future is indeed grim, with few promising opportunities and often continuing financial struggles. Students who don’t graduate:

• Are more likely to be unemployed; receive public assistance; commit crimes; and become incarcerated.

• Are less likely to receive job-based health insurance and have pension plans; be as healthy and live as long as graduates; vote and engage in civic activities.5

In addition, the median earnings of families headed by a high school dropout today have declined by a third compared to 30 years ago. Furthermore, dropouts earn less than high school graduates ($8 per hour versus $13) and only one-third of what college graduates earn.

Beyond the consequences for individuals, students that drop out also have an impact on the nation.

• In the United States, student achievement has largely stagnated while many other countries have seen major gains in the past 30 years.

• In comparison to other Economic and Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, in 2003 the United States was 15th of 29 in reading literacy.

• Similarly, in 2003 the United States ranked 14th in the rate of high school students moving on to college—thirty years ago, the United States was ranked number one.

• If we could increase the graduation rate by just 1 percent, crimes would be decreased by 94,000 a year, and there would be an annual yield of $1.8 billion in social benefits.7

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**Figure 1. National High School Graduation Rate: Class 2005**

Source: Swanson, Cities in Crisis, 2009

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All students | Native American | Black | Hispanic | White | Asian | Male | Female | City | Town | Rural | Suburb
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | ---
70.6 | 50.6 | 55.3 | 57.8 | 77.6 | 81.3 | 67.8 | 70.3 | 60.9 | 71.7 | 74.0 | 75.3
The Role of School-Community Partnerships in Dropout Prevention

According to a recent survey of high school dropouts, youths identified a variety of reasons for leaving school (see Fig. 3). For most students, dropping out of school is not simply due to lack of skills or dislike for school. The underlying causes of dropout are much more complex and entail many different factors. Although student and family characteristics are the predominant reasons, the environment—school and neighborhood—in which youths experience their daily lives also matter in whether or not they will graduate and succeed. Indeed, the National Research Council Panel on High-Risk Youth conducted an analysis of why students dropped out of school and concluded that too much emphasis was being placed on individual and family factors and not enough on the high-risk settings that form much of the context of young people’s lives. Thus, the community in which students reside and their school’s environment can exert a significant influence on whether or not they will complete high school.

Community and School Characteristics Associated with Dropout

Communities play a crucial role in adolescent development and can influence access to resources (e.g., child care, medical care, employment opportunities) and relationships (e.g., family, friends, community organizations). Communities have varying expectations for young people, as well as different kinds of supports, distractions, and negative influences. For example, two research studies found that communities with a higher incidence of neighborhood violence were associated with more students dropping out. On the other hand, simply living in an affluent community may be a protective factor. Students residing in these communities generally have greater access to community resources and positive role models.

Additionally, the National Student Assistance Association found that students who dropped out had more challenges in their daily lives than students who remained in school. Many of these students resided in communities with:

- Economic and social pressures;
Alterations in family composition and stability;

Breakdown of neighborhoods and extended families;

Weakening in community institutions;

Less contact between young people and parents;

Ongoing exposure to media that encourage health-damaging behavior; and

Mental health and substance use problems—their own, family members, friends, and their neighbors.14

**School Characteristics**

Although student and family characteristics are the largest indicators in predicting whether a student will drop out, certain school characteristics may also contribute. All else being equal, 20 percent of variability in student outcomes can be attributed to the characteristics of the school.15 This is not to say that schools are pushing students out. Some do, but there are characteristics of schools that are associated with students staying in school. These include:

- Smaller enrollments;
- Better interpersonal relationships between students and adults;
- Teachers who are more supportive of students;
- Curriculum that is both more focused and more rigorous;16
- Positive school climate (school loyalty, little reports of students fighting or cutting class);17
- High attendance rates;18
- Stronger academic climate (more students taking academic courses; students reporting doing more hours of homework);19 and

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**Figure 3. Top Five Reasons Why Students Drop Out**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classes not interesting</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive absences</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrounded by similar disengaged peers</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of structure</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failing in school</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts.*11
The Role of School-Community Partnerships in Dropout Prevention

- Positive student-teacher relationships (especially among high-risk students).²⁰

However, there are other school characteristics that may increase the odds of students dropping out. These schools are characterized by students as being unsafe;²¹ disruptive; or having a lot of discipline problems.²²

Then there are the schools that are considered “dropout factories.” Research conducted by Johns Hopkins University identified approximately 2,000 high schools (13 percent of all U.S. high schools) that produce about 50 percent of all high school dropouts. We know the following about these schools:

- The typical freshman class shrinks about 40 percent or more by the time the students reach their senior year.

- They are predominantly attended by minority and low-income students.

- They have fewer resources and qualified teachers.

- They are difficult to turn around because students have a multitude of problems.²³

In summary, the research presented above suggests that students do not drop out of school because it is just too hard or they did not care. Rather, the causes represent a complex pattern that interweaves academic, personal (health and social), family, and community factors. In addition to their own problems, many dropouts simply do not live or attend a school in an environment that encourages and supports their education. These factors are not insurmountable, however. Schools and community partners can work together, building on their strengths to create learning environments that prepare students for post-secondary success.
2. How School-Community Partnerships Can Engage Students and Reduce the Dropout Rate

“\textit{There’s a set of foundational things we need to do to meet the students’ social and emotional needs. And again, the more we open our school buildings to the community, the more we work together, not just with our children but the families, the more we create an environment where the students can maximize their academic potential.}”

— Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education

Because of the web of factors—many of which exist beyond the school building—that can lead students to drop out, it is difficult for teachers, principals, and other school personnel to address student needs on their own. Unfortunately, schools and districts generally lack the capacity to provide students with a holistic approach to education. As a result, the Study Group members affirmed that schools and school systems need multiple partnerships with families and community entities in order to fully support students’ education, especially those at risk of dropping out.

Teachers, principals, school administrators, and other personnel can no longer take sole responsibility for educating and preparing young people for life after high school. Engagement by family members and the community are vital to strengthening the social networks, resources, and capital available to children and youth. The additional resources—human, social, and financial—made available through community involvement can make a significant impact in keeping students in school.

According to Joyce Epstein, “School-community partnerships...can be defined as the connections between schools and community individuals, organizations, and businesses that are forged directly or indirectly to promote students’ social, emotional, physical,
and emotional development.” Using this definition, then, a community is not confined to a specific geographic location, but is instead the social interactions that occur within and across boundaries. These interactions can improve youths’ context in and outside of school and provide them with a better learning and social environment to support their academic achievement.

A. Role of the Community in Preventing Dropout

When a student drops out, the effects are felt beyond the individual. The community is also adversely affected financially, socially, and civically by students who drop out. This is becoming more and more true as the economic opportunities for dropouts continue to shrink in today’s information- and knowledge-based economy. Thus, communities—from neighborhood groups and local business associations to chambers of commerce and state business roundtables—have a growing stake in ensuring that the children and youth from their region succeed.

However, families and communities have typically relied on schools to educate their children. Given the complexity of the issues and the amount of resources needed, schools and districts do not have the capacity to fully address and end this crisis on their own. Thus, communities—from neighborhood groups and local business associations to chambers of commerce and state business roundtables—have a growing stake in ensuring that the children and youth from their region succeed.

Schools that have quality partnerships with the community offer three main advantages over schools that are educating students alone.

1) They garner additional resources for the school and reduce demands on the school staff. Schools with effective partnerships have access to resources and services beyond the walls of the school and could more adequately address a greater range of student needs that affect student learning. As a result, principals and teachers can focus their attention on the core mission of education—improving student learning.

2) They provide learning opportunities that develop both academic and non-academic competencies. Because of the additional resources offered, school and community collaborations provide further opportunities, during or after school, for youths to develop their intellectual, physical, social and psychoemotional development.

3) They offer young people, their families and community members an opportunity to build social and human capital. School-community partnerships enable all students to develop networks and

“School-community partnerships...can be defined as the connections between schools and community individuals, organizations, and businesses that are forged directly or indirectly to promote students’ social, emotional, physical and emotional development.”

—Joyce Epstein, Director, Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, Johns Hopkins University
social skills through mentoring relationships with caring adults, school-to-work learning, community experiences and similar experiences. Furthermore, they offer parents and other adults an avenue to learn and assume leadership roles and be much more involved with the education of the community’s youths.\textsuperscript{25}

Because of their advantages, school-community partnerships can more efficiently and effectively attend to many of the challenges youths face every day than can be addressed by schools alone, including:

- Cultural disconnects;
- Disengaged students;
- Poverty;
- Too much unstructured time;
- Unaddressed health needs;
- Transience;
- School violence and unsafe school environments; and
- Overburdened and under-resourced schools.\textsuperscript{26}

Fortunately, there are some communities across the country that are organizing to support their schools and children. For example, the \textbf{Black Star Project}, a community-based organization in Chicago, has been working with young people, families, and the community since 1996 to reduce the racial achievement gap. The organization provides students with education services from preschool to college to help them become productive members of their communities. One key initiative of the Project is the monthly Forums for Educational Excellence, where parents hear presentations on an important education issue and discuss steps for tackling that issue.\textsuperscript{27}

Another Chicago-based organization, the \textbf{Alternative Schools Network} has been working to curb the dropout crisis for the past 30 years. The largest collection of community-based alternative schools in the country, the Network is designed improve the city’s 50 percent graduation rate. One strategy the Network uses to improve the community and address dropout is to actively re-enroll teenagers who have dropped out of school. The Youth Scholars, Skills, and Service program provides a program mentor for students, incentives for making significant progress toward graduation, summer employment opportunities, and transition services once participants graduate. The program works with more than 400 dropout foster-care youths and graduates 60 students per year.\textsuperscript{28}

\textbf{Computers for Youth (CFY)} has been providing middle school students and their families in Atlanta, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco with computer-based learning in their homes. CFY is working with schools to break down the barriers between the school and home. Students in the 6th grade receive a refurbished computer loaded with educational and tutoring software to help them learn in the home.\textsuperscript{29}

These are just three examples of community efforts to support schools in their work to educate and re-engage youths. More initiatives like these can be found across the nation. These programs illustrate how family

“It’s relationships that change people not programs….We all need community.”

—Bill Miliken, Founder of Communities in Schools
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and community involvement can be more than bake sales, car washes, or attendance at school activities. Such efforts can both directly affect students and have a more general impact on school and district practices and policies, even driving larger decisions about how the systems operate. Some of these initiatives and strategies include:

- Assisting in analyzing the effectiveness and efficiency of the programs and initiatives at and outside of the school;

- Serving as a bully pulpit and demanding that school, district, and state policies are examined and audited to ensure that they support students learning and academic achievement;

- Providing the sustained forward momentum needed for school reform as school, district, and state leaders come and go;

- Expanding the capacity of urban public schools to support student success by building support for reform alternatives;

- Advocating increased equity in the distribution of resources; and

- Generating meaningful parent, youth, and community engagement focused on improving student learning.30

B. Evidence Supporting the Impact of Partnerships

Research has shown that strategic school-community partnerships and initiatives can have a positive impact on student, family, and school outcomes. An evaluation of the Computers for Youth partnership cited above, conducted in collaboration with the Educational Testing Service, found that students participating in the program increased their mathematics performance on standardized tests. In addition, parents indicated that because of the partnership, they were more confident in their ability to help in their child’s education and were comfortable using the computer to achieve this goal.32

A longitudinal study following seven community organizing sites for six years found that

Figure 4. How Does Community Organizing Work to Transform Schools and Communities?31

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORGANIZATIONAL INPUTS</th>
<th>COMMUNITY OUTCOMES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build base</td>
<td>Accountable schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop adult or youth leadership</td>
<td>Successful student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise power</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMUNITY ORGANIZING ACTIVITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognize community power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand or shift priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement new strategies to improve schooling capacity</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>SCHOOLS/SCHOOL SYSTEM OUTCOMES</th>
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<td>Accountable schools</td>
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<td>Successful student learning</td>
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these collaborations can increase student attendance, improve standardized test score performance and increase graduation rates and college-going aspirations. In addition, these organizing sites effected positive school-level changes, including improvements in school-community relationships, parent involvement and engagement, sense of school community and trust, teacher collegiality, and teacher morale. The findings also suggest that these efforts had an influence on education policy and increased equity in the distribution of school resources.

A research synthesis conducted by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory examining 51 studies found similar results. The studies included in the synthesis found strong evidence of links between family and community engagement and student achievement. Furthermore, community efforts aimed at holding schools and districts accountable for low student achievement contributed to changes in policy, resources, personnel, school culture, and educational programs.

Thus, well-designed and implemented school-community partnerships can have the following effects:

**Student:**
- Higher literacy and mathematics grades and test scores;
- Better attendance;
- Improved social skills, resulting in improved behavior at school and at home;
- Increased graduation rates;
- Increased college-going aspirations; and
- Greater involvement in civic and community activities.

**Family:**
- Greater ownership of the school and community activities.

**School:**
- Upgraded school facilities;
- Improved school leadership and staffing;
- Higher-quality learning programs for students;
- New resources and programs to improve teaching and curriculum; and
- New funding for after-school programs and family supports.

**Community:**
- Greater civic engagement and
- Increased knowledge of and investment in education issues.

These positive outcomes are clearly important—and they are necessary if schools and communities are to successfully tackle the dropout crisis. But it is the contention of the Study Group that while these school-community partnerships (and their outcomes) are necessary, they are not sufficient to get the job done. A look at current dropout prevention strategies will help explain why.

**C. A Systemic, Comprehensive Model for Dropout Prevention**

Currently, the majority of strategies and initiatives aimed at reducing the dropout rate are small in scope and not comprehensive. They also tend to focus exclusively on student interventions through activities such as remediation, credit recovery, or tutoring. Yet as discussed above, students drop out for a variety of reasons. Focusing on student interventions is just one small piece of the puzzle.

However, there are a number of broader strategies compiled by the U.S. Department
of Education that have been rigorously evaluated and appear to have a positive impact on students’ engagement and prevent them from dropping out. These include:

- Personalized learning environments;
- Dual enrollment programs;
- Rigorous and relevant curriculum;
- Extended learning opportunities, such as before/after school, service learning;
- School-community partnerships;
- Qualified and engaging teachers;
- Adult advocates; and
- Having a robust data system.\(^{38}\)

Yet even these strategies, used individually, are only likely to help a subset of all students at risk of dropping out. To effectively address the dropout crisis, a systemic, comprehensive model that combines all of these efforts is needed. Current efforts are too piecemeal and inadequate. A system-wide reform approach that tackles the problem from multiple angles and involves students, educators, leaders, and other community stakeholders is the only solution that will not only prevent students from dropping out of school, but also provide them with the education needed for postsecondary success. This model should include:

- Increased personalization and student outreach;
- A relevant and rigorous curriculum;
- High standards;
- Intensive instruction and engaging programs;
- Improved teacher quality, professional development, and teacher supports;
- Dedicated leaders;
School structures that support 21st century learning;

Strengthened connections between high schools and colleges, employers, and the greater community;

A data system that can identify individual’s students progress and needs;

Adequate human and financial resources; and

Policies that support all of the above.

The Study Group believes strongly that these efforts are all needed in large, sustained, and coordinated measures—something educators, policymakers, experts, and community members have been advocating for some time. America’s Promise 10-Point Plan, which has been endorsed by more than 100 educators and community organizations, outlines the key elements needed see box at right). Other partnerships and organizations, such as the Alliance for Excellent Education, ASCD, Forum for Youth Investment, National Dropout Prevention Center, National Education Association, National High School Alliance, and National High School Center, have presented similar frameworks for sustainable and widespread improvements in academic achievement.

At the same time, it is not sufficient to have dropout prevention programs or strategies in place if they are not implemented fully and effectively. Unfortunately, as Balfanz and Letgers write, “... this has rarely occurred because schools and districts have lacked the energy, know-how, and resources to do all that is needed. Instead districts and schools have focused on one or two areas of needed reform and then become disappointed and frustrated when the results are not sufficient.”

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America’s Promise Alliance 10-Point Plan to End America’s Silent Epidemic

1. Support accurate graduation and dropout data.

2. Establish early-warning systems to support struggling students.

3. Provide adult advocates and student supports.

4. Support parental engagement and individualized graduation plans.

5. Establish a rigorous college- and work-preparedness curriculum for high schools.

6. Provide supportive options for struggling students to meet rigorous expectations.

7. Raise compulsory school age requirements under state laws.

8. Expand college-level learning environments in high schools.

9. Focus the research and disseminate best practices.

10. Make increasing graduation and college/workforce preparedness a national priority.

Another point to remember is that dropout prevention models cannot be replicated in a cookie cutter fashion. What works in one state, district, or school may not work in another. When developing a model, then, the specific local context and available resources need to be considered, along with a pragmatic approach to implementation. However, all models, regardless of context and resources, should consider the elements listed above.

Only when each element is addressed will there be a large impact on the dropout crisis.

For this report, the Study Group turned its attention to the element of school-community partnerships—though by no means does that lessen the importance of the comprehensive model as a whole. The next section examines the critical features and issues to consider around strategic partnerships.

“It is very difficult to effect change in the educational system because of traditional methods of doing things and also vested interests. There is a commonly held belief that accountability strategies will magically transform low-performing schools into high-performing ones. There are no panaceas for the multitude of problems facing schools today. Expecting students to meet higher standards while continuing in the same educational rut is not realistic.”

— Jay Smink, Director of the National Dropout Prevention Center

Source: National Dropout Prevention Center (www.dropoutprevention.org)
3. Developing Strategic Partnerships

When developing strategic partnerships, districts and schools have to consider how these collaborations not only benefit their students and schools, but also how they fit with the state’s overall education framework. The best partnerships are those that are part of a larger, much more comprehensive plan to turn around schools and prevent students from dropping out. As a stand-alone dropout prevention strategy, it may assist some students, but to be sustainable and have a broad impact, school-community collaborations need to folded into other state and local efforts and be supported by the state.

State support comes in many forms. State boards, chief state school officers, and governors can encourage partnerships by using their bully pulpit to highlight the importance of partnerships as part of a comprehensive dropout framework or with incentive grants. States can also support the development and maintenance of collaborations by providing the necessary resources—human and financial—and through policy.

Not all collaborative efforts are equally successful, and they therefore have different impacts on students, families, and schools. Several key issues need to be considered when developing strategic school-community partnerships, and understanding these issues is important not just for local educators and community members, but for district and state leaders, as well. This knowledge will ensure that states are creating and supporting the appropriate policies and initiatives that strengthen and sustain effective school-community partnerships.
A. Issues to Consider When Developing Partnerships

1) Addressing Students’ Needs

First and foremost, partnerships should address the needs of the students. The focus of the services and collaborative mechanisms may be different from grade to grade as young people face different issues, but programs should always support their learning and development environments.

Questions to Consider:

1) What are the needs of the students and their families?
2) What services can the school provide well?
3) What services/programs/resources are needed that require family and community involvement?
4) What community partners should then be pursued to fill those needs?

2) Purpose of Partnerships

The better partnerships create purposeful opportunities for collaboration and partnering by having clear and specific goals. They do not partner and convene just to do so or mainly for the good for public relations opportunities they will present. Instead, these collaborative efforts have substance and a commitment by all individuals involved. In addition, they have clear action plans that outline the roles and responsibilities of each of the partners. The most important goal any partnership should have is to enhance student learning and achievement in specific ways.

Table 1 includes examples of potential partners. Selecting the appropriate partner depends on the student need(s) that should be met and which the school cannot adequately and/or efficiently meet. For example, if a school is trying to get students to read more, then a collaboration with the local library is an obvious choice. However, schools and districts could also consider the local television station. Since young people spend so much time watching television, an innovative program that combines reading and TV viewing could well be an effective approach to improved literacy.

Although all partners should be committed to an effort, this does not mean they all need to have the same level of investment. The level of investment depends on:

- Students’ needs;
- Services requested;
- Capacity of the school;
- Capacity of the district;
- Capacity of the partner; and
- Duration.

If the collaboration is simply donation of materials and is just a one-time commitment, then it could be simple. More complex partnerships, on the other hand, such as establishing a dual enrollment program with a university or professional development opportunities with a business, involve a greater amount of human and financial capital (fig. 6 on page 19 depicts the range of complexity of school-community partnerships).

Questions to Consider:

1) What do you hope to accomplish through these partnerships?
2) What is the specific role of each of the partners?
3) How do the school/district and partner each benefit by the relationship?

3) Unique Qualities of each School/Community’s Circumstances

The specific development, goals, and implementation of collaborations will always be
## Table 1. Potential Partners for School-Community Partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Partners</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business/Corporations/Unions</td>
<td>Local businesses and associations; National corporations and franchises; Chambers of commerce; School employee union; AAA; Teamsters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Institutions/Students</td>
<td>Colleges and universities; High schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Agencies and Bodies</td>
<td>Departments of Health, Mental Health, Children &amp; Family Services; Public Social Services; Probation; Sheriff; Office of Education; Fire; Service Planning Area Councils; Recreation &amp; Parks; Library; courts; housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal Agencies and Bodies</td>
<td>Parks &amp; recreation; Library; Police; Fire; Courts; Civic event units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical and Mental Health &amp; Psychosocial Concerns Facilities and Groups</td>
<td>Hospitals; Health care centers; Mental health facilities; Health departments; Health foundations and associations; Clinics; Guidance centers; Family crisis and support centers; Helplines, hotlines, and shelters; Meditation and dispute resolution centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government and Military Agencies</td>
<td>Fire departments; Police departments; Chambers of commerce; City councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Service and Volunteer Organizations</td>
<td>Rotary Club; Lions Club; Kiwanis Club; VISTA; Concerned Black Men, Inc.; Shriners; Boy &amp; Girl Scouts; YMCA; United Way; AmeriCorps; Urban League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith-Based Organizations</td>
<td>Churches; Mosques; Synagogues; Other religious organizations and charities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Associations</td>
<td>Korean Youth Center; United Cambodian Community; African-American, Asian-Pacific, Native American Organizations; Professional Associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Citizen Organizations</td>
<td>Nursing homes; Senior volunteer and service organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and Recreational Institutions</td>
<td>Zoos; Museums; Libraries; Recreational centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Organizations</td>
<td>Local newspapers; TV; Radio stations; Cable networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Franchises and Associations</td>
<td>Minor and major league sports teams; NBA; NCAA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Community Organizations</td>
<td>Fraternities; Sororities; Foundations; Neighborhood associations; Political organizations; Alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Individuals</td>
<td>Individual volunteers from the surrounding community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Role of School-Community Partnerships in Dropout Prevention

Questions to Consider:

1) What agencies and providers are currently involved in the school?
2) What agencies and providers might be involved in the future?
3) Which of the available services are working in a positive way for students and their families?
4) What programs and services do students and parents wish we offered?

4. Integration of Services

Student services need to be integrated both within the school and between the school and community. This will ensure that there is no duplication of effort, as well as a better coordination of services. By pulling resources together, students will not only have more services to support them, but they are more likely to seek out those services.

Integration of services is not an easy process and requires a great deal of commitment, time, and hard work across agencies, organizations, etc. An infrastructure with clear roles and responsibilities and leadership are needed. Fig. 7 presents a basic collaborative infrastructure. Each partnership is unique and should discuss the specifics of each group. For a successful collaboration, this needs to be con-

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**Figure 6. Range of Complexity of School-Community Partnerships**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple Partnerships</th>
<th>Complex Partnerships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Short term</td>
<td>• Long term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unidirectional</td>
<td>• Bidirectional or multidirectional exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low level of interaction</td>
<td>• High level of interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Limited planning</td>
<td>• Extensive planning and coordination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples: Incentives for awards programs, Donation of school materials/supplies

Examples: Full-service community schools; Professional development for school staff

Source: Sanders41

different in every community. Each community has its own strengths and weaknesses, as well as its own culture that cannot be duplicated. As noted above, this is not a process where one school or district’s model for school-community partnerships can simply be lifted for use in another. Instead, the goals and activities developed by the partners should embrace the diversity of the community and build connections based on that community’s needs and strengths.
ducted before services are offered to students to ensure a well-integrated support system.

Questions to Consider:

1) What services, if any, are being duplicated in our community?

2) What services are provided in the community, but not easily accessible and therefore might be provided at the school site?

3) Who—or what entity—is responsible for ensuring that programs and services within a school, district, or state are coordinated?

5. Adequacy of Support

Successful partnerships are dependent on policy support and financial resources, as well as adequate training and professional development for all involved. There has to be continual investment and commitment by all parties if these efforts are to be successful.

Questions to Consider:

1) How much time and money will the initiative cost the school and partners?

2) What do we know is needed to accomplish our goals in terms of money, human resources, materials, staff development, etc.?

3) Are school personnel trained in engaging with families and community partners?

4) What will be the critical elements of support necessary from the school district’s central office and board of education?

Figure 7. Basic Collaborative Infrastructure

- **staff work group**
  for pursuing operational functions/tasks (e.g., daily planning, implementation, and evaluation)

- **standing work groups**
  for pursuing programmatic functions/tasks (e.g., instruction, learning supports, governance, community organization, community development)

- **steering group**
  (e.g., drives the initiative, uses political clout to solve problems)

- **ad hoc work groups**
  for pursuing process functions/tasks (e.g., mapping, capacity building, social marketing)

*STAFFING

- Executive Director
- Organization Facilitator (change agent)

WHO SHOULD BE AT THE TABLE?

- families
- schools
- communities

Source: Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA
6) Evaluation

Policymakers, educators, parents, and the community want to know what positive changes community partnerships can make, as well as the lessons learned from the effort (both in terms of process and outcomes). Before addressing this issue, partners must first ask, “Given our goals, what indicators of success should we be looking for?”

Improved student learning, achievement, and engagement must be long-term objectives to meeting the goals. However, other student indicators could include: attendance, promotion, retention, graduation, suspension, expulsion, social behavior, and healthy youth development.

In addition, school, family, and community interactions should be measured to assess the success of the collaborations. Some of these outcomes could include parental involvement, school and community climate, and access to support services.

In addition to outcomes, the evaluation needs to also assess changes in student needs and whether the current partnerships still meet those needs. Other process and implementation data, such as communication plans, fulfillment of roles and responsibilities of partners, and service delivery should be included in the evaluation to examine the possible strengths and weaknesses in the collaborations. Depending on what is found, adjustments may need to be made or new partnerships may need to be formed.

Questions to Consider:

1) How will we collect data?
2) What outcomes are we looking for?
3) What are some indicators of progress?
4) What barriers to success do we foresee?

B. Challenges to Developing and Sustaining Partnerships

As suggested, building and sustaining strong partnerships is not an easy task, and it entails significant investment from parties on both sides of an initiative. There are several common challenges to developing successful collaborative efforts. Schools and districts that are beginning to develop their partnerships should think through these challenges to ensure that their relationships will be effective and efficient. Additionally, state leaders and policymakers can help schools and districts meet these challenges with policies and other support.

- Colliding Collaborations: As we have seen, current efforts at keeping students engaged in school and preventing them from dropping out are piecemeal and disconnected. Services are not aligned as students transition from school to school and there is little collaboration across agencies and organizations. Many large high schools are simultaneously hosting a plethora of programs for students that may or may not intersect, even if they have similar objectives—or worse, they
may have conflicting processes or even conflicting objectives. The same problems can be found at the district and state levels. It is no wonder that school-community collaboration has been described as “dancing with an octopus.” One reason for such confusion is likely to be the lack of a unified, systemic framework. Additionally, a cohesive set of policies could ground the collaborations and reduce redundancy and efficiency.

- **Leadership:** A unifying framework, in turn, needs the support of leaders at every level and agency. Educators need to work with families and communities and vice versa. Without adequate leadership, partnerships will not be effective. It is not sufficient for leaders to voice their support for these collaborations, they need to advocate for them, help develop them, locate the necessary resources to support them, and coordinate the various collaborative efforts.

- **Integrating School and Community Resources:** Providing comprehensive services to students requires moving beyond the walls of the school. It entails cross-agency collaboration as well as involvement with other community organizations and families. Students and families can have problems navigating the different offices; they also may be unable to because of time and/or transportation constraints.

- **Data:** To be able to address all of student’s needs, schools need accurate and timely data on those needs. Unfortunately, few schools have an adequate data system. Due to federal mandates under NCLB, schools are better able to identify students who need additional academic assistance than eight years ago, but there is still considerable room for improvement. At the same time, reliable data on students’ mental and physical health is not widely available. Schools typically rely on teachers, nurses, or counselors to identify students that may need additional services rather than having a systematic and comprehensive mechanism.

Another data challenge is sharing information. Parents and schools are concerned about disclosing nonacademic student information to individuals and organizations that are outside the school walls.

- **Accountability:** Current accountability measures under NCLB focus on students’ academic achievement, but do not hold schools accountable for student’s mental and physical health and general welfare (other than the “persistently dangerous”

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**Effective partnerships:**

- Have a clear vision and goals to support student achievement;
- All parties involved know their role and responsibilities;
- Mapped student and school needs with community resources;
- Have a strategic and action plan;
- Have dedicated leaders and support staff;
- Meet regularly;
- Held accountable and are continuously evaluated;
- Have adequate financial, human, and social resources; and
- Have authority to influence policy and implement effective strategies.
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label being attached to a school, from which students may transfer). Furthermore, the law requires schools to engage with parents, but does not include level and quality of parental involvement in determining Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Finally, there is no regulatory guidance that requires partnerships with communities. With the focus specifically on academic achievement and the lack of provisions to encourage greater engagement with families and the community, there is little federal support for school-community partnerships.

- **Adequate Resources (funding, space, personnel):** Without adequate resources, a well-laid plan will remain just a plan rather than an action. Schools must have enough physical space to provide the services students need. Additional offices and rooms may be necessary or existing spaces upgraded. Sufficient personnel who are appropriately trained are also required to oversee and manage the work. Unfortunately, neither can be fulfilled without adequate funding.

C. The Core Action Steps to Developing Partnerships

Developing successful partnerships requires a great deal of careful planning, analysis, and leadership. A brief description of the core actions and elements are provided below. The core actions are not necessarily linear and can occur concurrently.

1) **Identify student needs:** Each school and district are different, so merely making assumptions about student needs may lead to having services available that students do not require. By identifying student needs, resources and services that address those needs can be pinpointed. For example, are there many students who are also parents? If this is the case, then the school could provide daycare on-site or nearby.

Partnerships with businesses and higher education institutions are always a good idea. Businesses can provide opportunities for students to do job shadowing, hold internships, learn business skills, and see how lessons in the classrooms can be used on the job. Higher education institutions can, for example, provide students opportunities to attend lectures, develop better studying and note taking skills, and better understand how the knowledge and skills learned in high school are built on in higher education.

2) **Identify school resources:** Does the school currently have the resources to address all student needs? If there are gaps or limitations, then these are the areas where community resources should be identified.

3) **Identify community resources for addressing student needs:** Depending on the gap analysis, schools should then seek partnerships to fill these gaps or strengthen the resources that are currently available.

4) **Build partnerships and a leadership team:** Once the appropriate organizations are identified, partnerships and a leadership team can then be developed. This is not a one-person task. Leadership is needed at every level: school, district, state, and within the community. Leaders at the state and district levels can make sure that schools have adequate resources. Principals are extremely important because they serve as the liaisons between the district and state, as well as the community. Each organization that is part of the effort also needs to identify a liaison that will work with the school and/or district and the other partnering organizations.
Put together, the leadership team will be responsible for developing an action plan with expectations and responsibilities of each organization to ensure efficiency. The team should also be held accountable for achieving the goals of that plan.

5) **Ensure adequate support in terms of policies, funding, and training:** Although the day-to-day work of school-community partnerships is at the district and school levels, the state board of education can help provide the resources needed to adequately develop and sustain these partnerships. The state board can work with the education department to provide grants and incentives to local education agencies, schools, and organizations. Most importantly, the board should examine the adequacy of its policies. Those that hinder partnerships can be changed or nullified and replaced by new policies that stress the importance of partnerships. Policies may also need to be developed to support training, technical assistance, and continued professional development. For example, policies that do not allow sharing of student information may protect student privacy, but they also create an obstacle to providing services. A cross-agency database of student information will allow students to receive assistance much more efficiently. Very restrictive funding formulas are another example of policies and programs that can hamper partnerships. If agencies or different funding streams cannot be combined to serve student needs as schools see fit, the implementation of innovative programs, including strategic collaborations, could be limited.

6) **Select a site-based coordinator:** Partnerships, regardless of the leadership and adequacy of resources, will not be successful without a site-based coordinator. This person oversees the whole operation—all of the pieces in this complex and moving effort—and is charge of helping schools identify their students’ needs, the gaps in school resources, and possible partnerships to fill in those gaps. It is this person’s responsibility to champion this cause as well as help carry it out.
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The table below lists key dimensions that should be discussed when schools and districts are developing their school-community partnerships. Having this discussion during the development stage of the partnership will ensure an effective and efficient collaboration and that students are provided with the support they need to create an optimal learning environment.

Table 2. Key Dimensions Relevant to Family-Community-School Collaborative Arrangements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Initiation</th>
<th>VI. Ownership &amp; Governance of Programs and Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. School-led</td>
<td>A. Owned &amp; governed by school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Community-driven</td>
<td>B. Owned &amp; governed by community</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II. Nature of Collaboration</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Formal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Memorandum of understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Contract</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organizational/operational mechanisms</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>B. Informal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Verbal agreements</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ad hoc arrangements</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>III. Focus</th>
<th>VII. Location of Programs and Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Improvement of program and service provision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For enhancing case management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For enhancing use of resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Major systemic reform</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To enhance coordination</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• For organizational restructuring</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• For transforming system structure/function</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV. Scope of Collaboration</th>
<th>VIII. Degree of Cohesiveness among Multiple Interventions Serving the Same Student/Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Number of programs and services involved (from just a few up to a comprehensive, multifaceted continuum)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Horizontal collaboration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Within a school/agency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Among schools/agencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Vertical collaboration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Within a catchment area (e.g., school and community agency, family of schools, two or more agencies)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Among different levels of jurisdictions (e.g., community/city/county/state/federal)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V. Scope of Potential Impact</th>
<th>IX. Level of Systemic Intervention Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Narrow band: a small proportion of youth and families can access what they need</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Broad-band: all in need can access what they need</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X. Arenas for Collaborative Activity</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Health (physical and mental)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Social services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Work/career</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Enrichment/recreation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Juvenile justice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Neighborhood/community improvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center for Mental Health in School at UCLA.
4. Recommendations for States

Although partnerships are conducted at the school and district-level, state leaders can leverage their role to provide support and infrastructure, create policies, and use their bully pulpit to highlight and elevate the urgency to reduce the dropout crisis. Following are the Study Group’s recommendations for state leaders to support dropout prevention policies and initiatives, particularly those that include effective and strategic school-community partnership models.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:**
Leverage the role of the state board of education to promote the importance of school-community partnerships as part of a comprehensive dropout prevention plan.

The state board can do this by being:

- Convener and conveyer;
- Developer;
- Financer; and
- Policymaker.

**a. Convener and Conveyer:** Create a communication plan to inform students, parents, other stakeholders, department of education staff, districts, and schools on community and education issues and how each of these individuals and entities can be involved.

Two of the main roles state policymakers can play are as convener of stakeholders and groups and as a conveyer of information. Using their bully pulpit, state leaders can:

- Conduct listening tours or forums to hear from students, families, educators, administrators, school personnel, and stakeholders on the services they need, what types of partnerships they need, what types of partnerships are working, and what barriers and challenges they are running into;
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Characteristics of an Effective Communications Plan

- Applies current public opinion survey research to determine public priorities.
- Develops goals that reflect the public interest.
- Focuses on a few key goals, such as promoting school improvement.
- Uses themes and examples that support the goals.
- Follows a schedule for accomplishment.
- Allows flexibility to take advantage of opportunities and respond to criticism.
- Employs a variety of communications techniques, such as giving interviews and editorial board briefings, public hearings and press conferences, testimony and guest commentary, and providing information online.
- Offers ways for local school boards and educators to apply the key messages in local situations.
- Designates a chief media spokesperson to assure consistent messages, although several board members can share this role after they agree on message and talking points.
- Allows checkpoints for adjustment of tactics or messages.
- Measures results, including the quantity and quality of placements; favorability of the coverage, changes in public attitudes, support for goals/policies measured by results, via elections and referenda; public opinion polls, public comment, or even lack of opposition.

Source: NASBE44

- Bring together individuals to discuss educational issues;
- Create support and buy-in for state policies and initiatives; and
- Highlight the urgency of specific issues.

State Examples

Recipients of NASBE’s High School Policy Grants were required to convene stakeholders to discuss how to turn around low-performing schools. West Virginia conducted student forums with high school students to hear their thoughts on what they needed to be prepared for postsecondary education. Their answers were aligned with those of experts in the field and included a rigorous curriculum, along with more applied learning. Because of the effectiveness of these student forums, state officials hope to conduct them more frequently.

Ohio team members met with their stakeholders group, which included administrators and educators, to discuss the state’s current policies on turning around low-performing high schools. One realization the team members came to at this meeting was that the stakeholders did not know about some of the policies the state had or why the policies had been developed. As a result, Ohio is in the process of drafting policies that would require the state to have a communication plan when a new policy is passed or an old law has been significantly changed.
**Illinois**’ state team met with business and higher education stakeholders to discuss what high school students need to succeed. One of the conclusions reached was the state needed to develop a vision for what high school students should be able to do when they graduate, along with a corresponding action plan and policy support.

The **Virginia Commission on Youth** partnered with the Boys and Girls Clubs to hold youth roundtable discussions in five cities across the Commonwealth. The Commission members were examining truancy and dropout in Virginia and felt student representation was needed. One finding from these roundtables was that students wanted job opportunities within the community to be made available through schools.

**Virginia Beach Communication Plan**: The Virginia Beach school district created a two-stage communication plan. They first conducted an analysis of the current situation regarding parent involvement, as well as identifying under-served populations. The analysis also investigated strategies for effectively communicating with parents. Results of the analysis found that barriers to parental involvement in the district included lack of time, unresponsiveness on the part of schools, lack of transportation, and other family responsibilities. To address these barriers, the school system developed a number of resources and programs to better engage families inside and outside the school. The district developed the Parent Connection webpage to provide resources, information, and upcoming events for parents. The Parent Connection program also partners with Old Dominion University to provide free workshops for parents on various topics in parenting. Finally, since Virginia Beach serves a large number of military families, the school system developed a welcome kit for newly stationed families that includes school policies and other information to help families acclimate faster to the new school system.

**Indiana Parental Information and Resource Center**: Indiana is one of five Parental Information Resource Centers highlighted by the U.S. Department of Education. The Center’s many accomplishments include:

- Establishing 75 state-run parent centers across the state;
- Helping schools assess their family friendliness through surveys in both Spanish and English;
- Training parent liaisons to help schools connect with hard-to-reach parents, creating family-friendly schools, and developing cultural competence within schools; and
- Developing materials in areas such as helping parents know what questions to ask about their student and how to ask them in both print and online resources.

**Questions for Reflection:**

- Does your state currently have a communication/awareness plan to inform parents, other stakeholders, department of education staff, districts, and schools on community and education issues and programs, including success stories?
- What actions have you taken to engage with parents and stakeholders, such as forums, listening tours, convening stakeholders?
- What role do parents and other stakeholders have in developing education policies and strategies?

**Developer**: State boards of education can lead by example as they develop and facilitate partnerships, as well as support local collaborations that connect state-level policymakers to workforce development, higher education, families, and the community at-large. Another role state lead-
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ers can play is to develop partnerships or be a part of a collaborative effort with student groups, families, and the community to address education issues, including the dropout problem in their state.

State Examples

Arizona’s P-20 Council: Established in 2005, the Council’s goal is to align the education system from birth through postsecondary education, as well as with “the expectations of 21st century employers.” Accomplishments include recommendations for increased rigor in math standards that were adopted to bridge junior and senior level math to college level math, as well as adoption of Education and Career Action plans effective for freshman as of 2009.

West Virginia 21st Century Jobs Cabinet: The 21st Century Jobs Cabinet of West Virginia is a multidisciplinary executive board made up of all of the state agency heads responsible for the P-20 educational system; key representatives and decisionmakers from the state board of education and the legislature; and parents, students, and business executives. By virtue of Gov. Joe Manchin’s executive order No. 7-06, the Cabinet has the “authority and responsibility” to “propose and endorse legislation and to oversee the implementation of policy and budget decisions” for the “P-20 system [that] complement the State’s job creation and economic development efforts.” Its purpose is to ensure collaboration among the sectors that make up this partnership, to identify the changes necessary to adapt West Virginia’s educational systems for the 21st century, and to advocate the implementation of those changes, both through the development of new policy and in the execution of those policies within individual agencies.

Louisiana’s Neighborhood Place: In 2008, Louisiana lawmakers passed legislation that provides for collaborative and integrated service delivery by putting critical human services offered by the five main state agencies and local service providers—the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Hospitals, the Department of Social Services, the Louisiana Workforce Commission and the Office of Youth Development—under one roof. Neighborhood Place uses a holistic approach and offers families a broad range of services, including student achievement services, child care assistance, Medicaid/LaCHIP, food stamps, workforce development, child welfare services, and more. The guiding principle behind Neighborhood Place is that when families find themselves facing serious challenges, they should be able to find these services at one easily accessible location.

Questions for Reflection:

- Does your state have an active P-20 council or something similar? Who are the members of the council? Given your state’s education framework, are there other stakeholders who should be included? What role, responsibilities, and authority does your council have?

- Financer: State boards of education can promote partnerships and dropout prevention initiatives by providing small grants to schools and districts or making sure currently available resources are allocated appropriately.

Sufficient policy support is evidenced by adequacy of funding for capacity building to a) accomplish desired system changes and b) ensure that collaboratives operate effectively over time. Without sufficient funding it is difficult to implement and sustain innovative ideas. Furthermore, policies and initiatives that are fully funded convey to the public that the state sees the issue as one of importance.
State Examples

The Tennessee Model Dropout Prevention Program is a state initiative that offers $6,000 dropout prevention service grants to districts. The grant is designed to allow districts to develop a program that is tailored to their community. District-level initiatives are encouraged to include school/community partnerships.

Six states (Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Vermont) have policies regarding the authorization of funding appropriations and creation of service-learning activities and programs.

Questions for Reflection:

- Does your state currently provide grants to schools or districts to create partnerships or dropout prevention programs?
- How does your state track and provide information to districts and schools on external sources of funding for partnerships and dropout prevention?
- What formula, if any, does your state use to allocate funding for special programs? Does the formula equitably reach intended populations?

Policymaker: State boards of education can use their role as policymakers to examine current policies and ensure they encourage, support, and sustain best practice models of school-community partnerships and dropout prevention. These policies can provide districts and schools with the necessary framework, capacity, and resources to support and sustain best practice models. Policies that hinder this development would be removed and, if needed, new policies would be developed.

The most important work for state leaders is to create policies that support innovations in building collaborative bridges connecting school, family, and community within the context of dropout prevention policies, plans, and programs. When policies are in place, schools will not marginalize such efforts, and the initiatives are more likely to be fully integrated with school improvement plans. Even though policies take considerable time to develop and resources to implement, when these policies are authentic agreements of support, their importance cannot be overemphasized. One significant barrier to the establishment and maintenance of effective collaboratives is the lack of clear, high-level, and long-term policy support that stresses the necessity to connect families, communities, and schools.

State leaders can support policies that:

- Promote accurate graduation and dropout data;
- Raise compulsory school age requirements;
- Improve teacher quality;
- Support services to students, including additional learning opportunities;
- Encourage collaborations with families, higher education, business, and the community; and
- Provide adequate financial, human, and social resources to support student achievement.

State Examples:

In 2009 four states (Idaho, Michigan, Kentucky, and Iowa) raised their legal dropout age from 16 to 18, making a total of 22 states (California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Kansas, Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Virginia,
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Washington, and Wisconsin) with this age requirement.

Nine states (California, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Michigan, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas) plus the District of Columbia encourage the use of service-learning as a mechanism for increasing student achievement and engagement.

Questions for Reflection:

- Have you recently reviewed your state’s policies and determined that they encourage and support school-community partnerships and other innovative strategies to engage students and keep them in school? Are there any policies that should be removed? Are there any policies that need to be added?

Resources

- In addition to a comprehensive high school reform model, NASBE’s High School Redesign Initiative website (www.nasbe.org/index.php/hsr) has a State Education Policies Review Worksheet that provides policymakers with a self-assessment for states to determine strengths and limitations within state policy regarding high school reform, including community involvement.

- The Business/Education Partnership Forum (www.biz4ed.org) provides resources on building successful partnerships between business and education. The Forum provides organizations, news and announcements in the field.

- The Business-Higher Education Forum (www.bhef.com) is a coalition of Fortune 500 CEOs, college and university presidents, and foundation leaders working to improve the nation’s education system. The College Readiness Initiative from the Forum helps develop local and state partnerships that promote college readiness, access, and success and works to disseminate the findings.

- The Education Commission of the States discusses the need for seamless integration of education institutions through P-16 systems in its report titled “The Progress of P-16 Collaboration in the States” (www.ecs.org/clearing-house/68/71/6871.pdf). The report includes progress that Georgia, Kentucky and Indiana have made in P-16 systems. In addition, it provides some challenges to P-16 systems for the short and long term.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Create a systemic, comprehensive education framework around an inclusive vision for student success that includes partnerships across programs and with families and the broader community.

Research on effective policies and initiatives to keep students engaged and in school while preparing them for any postsecondary pathway suggests that there are no “magic bullets” and that improvements do not happen overnight. Thus, school-community partnerships are most likely to succeed and be sustained when they are part of a state’s larger, cohesive, systemic model for student achievement. The partnerships must take into account other initiatives the state, districts, and schools are implementing and be coherent with these other efforts in order to avoid conflicts or overlaps that result in inefficiencies.

While this may seem obvious and considered to be “standard practice,” it is surprising how often this is disregarded or only partially followed. Many high school redesign policies and initiatives have a narrow focus or are disconnected. Some are focused only on spe-
cific priority topics (e.g., adolescent literacy) or on specific strategies (e.g., small schools, increasing course rigor), while others may be stand-alone programs where it is unclear how they relate to other support services. Although such approaches can have an effect, their scope is too frequently limited and may not have the widespread impact that is needed to improve all student outcomes.

Before states even consider developing policies to support school-community partnerships, state leaders must first examine the adequacy of their current policies and their larger educational framework, which should include the following elements:

a. Adequate support for all students’ academic, behavioral, and health needs that entails:
   - a relevant and rigorous curriculum;
   - assessments that are aligned to cur-
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Curriculum and instruction and used to measure progress as well as need:

- a 21st century learning environment;
- comprehensive student services; and
- a longitudinal data system that tracks individual students over time as well as providing timely reports on students who are at risk of dropping out.

b. Capacity and sustainability involving:

- sufficient support to teachers and administrators through networking, technical assistance, professional learning communities, or other professional development opportunities, and
- adequate funding and infrastructure.

c. Stakeholder involvement with:

- governor, chief state school officer, legislature, state education agency, local education agencies, parents, colleges and universities, business and community leaders.

d. Leadership from all levels—state, district, and school—that places dropout prevention as a priority.

All of these components must be part of the state’s vision for student success and be mapped onto a systemic, comprehensive framework. Strategic partnerships can then be used to adequately address these components.

In addition to incorporating all of these components, school systems need to be much more strategic and efficient in their delivery models. Not all students need the same intervention and same level of support. Districts and schools should create and implement a system that best fits their student population’s needs. Strategic partnerships can be used differently depending on the tier of support being targeted.

**Tier 1:** All students should receive a base level of support, such as a personalized learning environment.

**Tier 2:** Using an early warning system, teachers can catch students who are starting to fall through the cracks (such as by missing classes or having grades start to slip) and provide them with additional support early on.

**Tier 3:** For those students who are still struggling, additional, much more intensive and specialized services can be given.

For this to succeed, a rigorous, longitudinal data system is needed, which leads to the third recommendation, beginning on page 35.

**State Examples:**

In 2007, Mississippi officials released a comprehensive dropout prevention plan in response to the state’s dropout crisis. At that time, the state was reporting a four-year cohort dropout rate of 26.6 percent and an estimated four-year graduation rate of 61.1 percent. The plan had three main goals:

1) to increase the graduation rate to 85 percent by 2018-2019;

2) to reduce the state dropout rate by 50 percent by 2011-2012; and

3) to reduce the statewide truancy rate by 50 percent by 2011-2012.

The plan incorporated the 15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention, developed by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. For each strategy, the plan outlined its targeted population: all students district-wide, pre-kin-
Partners in Prevention:

Prior to implementing the strategies, education leaders examined the state’s current initiatives to determine which strategies were not addressed. Once this was completed, six implementation goals, seven components, and a corresponding timeline were developed. The components included:

- Public Relations Dropout Prevention Awareness Campaign;
- An Assessment of Current Initiatives;
- Dropout Recovery Programs;
- Transition Plans for Dropout Prevention;
- School Attendance Officer (SAO) Staff Refocusing Study;
- Federal Program/Funding Options; and
- Research Partnerships.

Clear benchmarks for each of the three main goals were outlined. The state Office of Dropout Prevention then proceeded to articulate the plan to the districts, schools, and the public through a public awareness campaign called “On the Bus.” Mini-conferences and continual feedback from stakeholders provided greater opportunity for input and community engagement.

Figure 10. Tiered Dropout Prevention Model

**Diplomas Now School Design**
Providing the Right Support to the Right Student at the Right Time

- **Intensive One-on-One Supports:**
  - Driven by needs assessment
  - Case managed
  - Professionally provided when whole school and moderate intensity supports are not sufficient

- **Extra Supports Provided:**
  - At first sign of student need
  - To all students who need it (no triage)
  - Diagnostic tools ensure it’s the right support (e.g., cognitive or socio-emotional)
  - Moderate intensity, but if needed continuously available

- **Whole School Is Organized and Supported to Enable:**
  - Effective instruction (including teacher professional development connected to the early warning indicators)
  - Safe and positive learning climate
  - High student engagement (students attend, behave, try hard)
  - Collective efficacy and “all graduate mission” among staff

Source: Balfanz45
The Role of School-Community Partnerships in Dropout Prevention

Minnesota has also adopted the 15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention, but they were modified for the state’s focus and needs. Minnesota’s Dropout Prevention, Retention, and Graduation Initiative consists of 10 strategies—school-community collaboration, safe learning environments, family engagement, literacy development, mentoring/tutoring, service learning, alternative schooling, after-school opportunities, professional development, and contextualized and active/individualized learning—delivered through a three-tiered model. This initiative is currently being piloted in seven districts: Brooklyn Center, Duluth, Hibbing, Park Rapids, Red Lake, Richfield, and St. Paul.

Questions for Reflection:

- What is your state’s vision for student success?
- Does your state have a systemic, comprehensive framework around this vision that covers the elements listed above (supporting the student; stakeholder involvement; capacity and sustainability; and leadership)?
- What model has your state adopted to provide students with necessary services? Does this model provide all students with the same level of support or differentiate depending on the student needs? Is your current system effective and efficient with this process?
- How can strategic partnerships be used to implement the state’s framework?

Resources

- NASBE’s High School Redesign Initiative (www.nasbe.org/index.php/hsr) provides a comprehensive model and resources for improving high schools and student outcomes through various interventions including school-community partnerships.

- The Annenberg Institute for School Reform (www.annenberginstitute.org) aims to build “smart education systems” where schools and communities work together to promote high quality student learning in and out of the classroom. The Institute has resources and a number of examples where their model is being implemented.

- The Council of Chief State School Officers developed a self-assessment tool www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/SSR%20Leadership%2008.pdf to assist State Education Agencies in making capacity and leadership decisions and planning a cohesive set of strategies for statewide secondary school redesign.

- The National High School Center developed eight elements for high school improvement www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSCEightElements7-25-08.pdf that provides the opportunity for success and sustainability from systemic reform. The elements are interrelated and provide a solid foundation for significant change in high school.

- The National Center on Response to Intervention (www.rti4success.org) works to integrate assessment with a multi-tiered intervention to help increase student achievement and reduce risk behaviors. The model identifies at-risk students and designs interventions specifically for the student’s needs.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Develop a longitudinal, comprehensive data system that includes students’ academic, behavioral, and health data that can provide real-time information and flag students at risk of dropping out. The data
Partners in Prevention:

One of the most valuable tools educators and policymakers can have to prevent students from dropping out, as well as provide them with rigorous and relevant instruction, is a comprehensive, longitudinal data system. Such data systems allow states:

- To assess the strategic partnerships needed to support student achievement;
- To determine which students are not on track early and provide them with support before they fall further behind;
- Better calculations of who is graduating and dropping out;
- To evaluate and better understand the impact of policies, initiatives, programs, and instruction and make necessary changes;
- A more holistic understanding of the student (rather than just academic indicators);

system should also include services and programs that the student and school are involved in.

Early Warning System

Research conducted by Johns Hopkins has found that 40 percent of students who eventually drop out can be identified as early as the 6th grade and 75 percent by the 9th grade. In the districts with a greater proportion of high poverty schools, 75 percent of eventual dropouts can be identified by 6th and 9th grades. These students can be identified by the following “A, B, C’s”:

- Attendance – attending school for less than 80 percent of the time;
- Behavior – out of school suspensions or sustained mild misbehavior (e.g., receiving a final poor behavior grade in two or more courses); and
- Course Failure – failing math, English, or any two courses in the 6th grade.

Other studies have found similar factors.

The Johns Hopkins and other researchers have suggested the following data elements are needed to create an early warning data system that identifies students at risk for dropping out:

- A unique identifier that allows an individual student to be tracked by grade level and from elementary to middle to high school;
- Accurate enrollment information on each student, including entry and exit by school attended;
- Student demographic information, including eligibility for the federal free and reduced-lunch program, race/ethnicity, gender, and age;
- Student transcript information, including courses attempted, courses completed, grades, credit earned, and any instances of being retained in a grade;
- Student attendance records;
- Student behavior grades or discipline records; and
- Student graduation and dropout information.

Sources: Balfanz and Legters (2004) and Gerald (2006)
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- More efficient and equitable distribution of support; and
- To evaluate the effect of teacher preparation and training programs on student achievement.46

Having good real-time data at the student- and school-level is essential to any school-community partnerships for the following reasons.

- Understanding the characteristics and needs of the student population is the first step in effective partnership development. Without accurate information, schools may not understand what is needed to support their students.

- Once student data and other information allow for identification of needs, schools can then assess what capacity and resources are available. After that, strategic partnerships can be developed to help schools in deficient areas.

- Data is also needed to continually assess the changing needs of students and whether the partnerships are addressing those needs. Partnerships can then be changed or even eliminated based on this information.

For states to help districts and schools develop effective collaborations, a longitudinal, comprehensive data system is first needed. Schools can use the information generated by the database to determine which students may not be college ready or to track down students at risk of dropping out due to high absences. State leaders have also used this information to influence their policymaking decisions. For example, states can run models to determine how specific policies may impact student achievement.47

**State Examples:**

Although no state has a comprehensive data system that includes health, social, and academic outcomes, as of 2008, six states met the Data Quality Campaign’s (DQC) 10 essential elements: **Arkansas, Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Louisiana, and Utah**. Florida was the first state to meet all requirements, and the state’s data system has been praised by many, including President Obama.

Florida’s data system connects K-12, post-secondary, and workforce information and provides each high school with a High School Feedback Report that includes:

- How well students are doing on college admissions tests;
- How well they are doing in their college courses, including
  - how many had to take remedial courses,
  - how many took and passed freshman math and English, and
  - the percentage who maintained at least a 2.0 GPA throughout their college semesters;
- The percentage of students who earn a diploma or GED;
- The percentage of students who took dual-enrollment college courses while in high school; and
- Tracking of students who took the highest level of high school mathematics and science courses.

The High School Feedback Report is available online so students and parents can see how their school compares to others in the state. Students and parents can also go online to see how the student is doing, including GPAs and course accumulations.

In addition to the High School Feedback Report, the state also produces Performance
on Common Placement Tests, which reports how Florida high school students did on the SAT, ACT, and the state’s community college placement tests.

In recent years, Pennsylvania has been developing a data system similar to Florida’s. The state’s system contains information on student demographics and attendance, staff characteristics and assignments, and courses and enrollment. The goal of the data system is to be able to link K-12 data to postsecondary data so state officials can determine how well the K-12 education system is preparing graduates for college. Unfortunately, the state has run into a problem that is not unique: district and school staff who are not prepared to use the information. If superintendents, principals, and teachers are not trained to understand, analyze, and act on data, then even the most robust longitudinal data system will be worthless and will not impact student achievement. (This leads to the fourth recommendation on adequate training, professional development, and technical assistance, beginning on page 40.)

In 2005, all 50 state governors signed the National Governors Association Graduation Counts Compact, a voluntary commitment to implement a common, more reliable formula for calculating state high school graduation rates. The four key components of the Compact are:

1) Use a common, four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate formula;

2) Build state data collection and reporting capacity;

3) Develop additional student outcome indicators, such as five- or six-year cohort graduation rate, completion rate for students earning alternative credentials, in-grade retention rate, college readiness rate, and high school dropout rate; and

4) Report annually on state progress toward meeting those commitments.

Currently, 20 states report they are using the NGA Compact formula to calculate their high school graduation rate. These include: Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, and Virginia.

Questions for Reflection:

- Has your state met the Data Quality Campaign’s 10 recommendations for data systems?

- What process (implementation) and outcome data does your state collect on the different policies, programs, and initiatives, including partnerships, that schools are implementing?

- How does your state use this information to influence state policies and initiatives?

- How does your state use this information to influence classroom instruction?

- Does your state have an early warning data system to identify potential dropouts? If yes, how does your state use this information to provide students with additional support, if needed?
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Resources

- The Data Quality Campaign (www.dataqualitycampaign.org) is a national effort to support the use of high-quality education data systems to improve student achievement. The Campaign offers resources on developing and implementing education data systems, as well as tracking the progress of each state in implementing the ten essential elements of a longitudinal education data system (see textbox below).

- The National High School Center developed an early-warning tool to help identify potential dropouts (www.betterhighschools.org/docs/EWStool.xls). The accompanying guide (www.betterhighschools.org/docs/IssueBrief_EarlyWarningSystemsGuide.pdf) provides information and guidance on how to use the tool and illustrates the importance of such a system to help curb dropout.

- Achieve issued “Identifying Potential Dropouts: Key Lessons for Building an Early Warning Data System” (www.achieve.org/files/IdentifyingPotentialDropouts.pdf) to provide policymakers with research on dropout and best strategies for building an early warning data system to identify students most in need of intervention services.

Data Quality Campaign: 10 Essential Elements of a State Longitudinal System

1. Statewide Student Identifier: A unique student identifier that connects student data across key databases across years.

2. Student-Level Enrollment Data: Student-level enrollment, demographic and program participation information.

3. Student-Level Test Data: The ability to match individual students’ test records from year to year to measure academic growth.

4. Information on Untested Students: Information on untested students and the reason they were not tested.

5. Statewide Teacher Identifier with a Teacher-Student Match: A teacher identifier system with the ability to match teachers to students.

6. Student-Level Course Completion (Transcript) Data: Student-level transcript information, including information on courses completed and grades earned.

7. Student-Level SAT, ACT, and Advanced Placement Exam Data: Student-level college readiness test scores.

8. Student-Level Graduation and Dropout Data: Student-level graduation and dropout data.

9. Ability to Match Student-Level P-12 and Higher Education Data: The ability to match student records between the P-12 and higher education systems.

10. A State Data Audit System: A state data audit system assessing data quality, validity, and reliability.
RECOMMENDATION 4:

Provide districts and schools with the necessary training, professional development, technical assistance, and information on best practice models to ensure the ability of leaders and staff to develop and sustain school-community partnerships and dropout prevention plans.

“But none of this matters—none of it—unless we do a better job translating data into a format that is truly useful to classroom teachers, and unless we hold our principals and superintendents accountable for creating a school culture that revolves around working with data, talking about data, and using data to change teaching practice and deploy financial resources.”

— Pennsylvania Gov. Edward Rendell

Although Gov. Rendell was talking about data systems, this point can be applied to any aspect of education. The best curriculum, policies, practices, or school structures will not successfully impact student engagement and achievement without full implementation—and full implementation includes providing administrators, educators, and school personnel with adequate information, training, professional development, and technical assistance.

Research has shown that students can do better when:

- Teachers and administrators have common planning time during which curriculum, instruction, and how students are doing can be discussed.

- Teachers, administrators, and school personnel are provided with an appropriate and sufficient process for learning the skills needed to implement the policies and practices.

- Teachers are provided with professional development opportunities.

STATE EXAMPLES

The Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement: In 2004, Ohio developed an implementation guide that provides a research-based model for developing partnerships. Included in the model is guidance on performing a needs and resource assessment for a community, developing strategic partnerships, and evaluating the progress of the partnership through measurable outcomes.

Wisconsin’s Fundamentals of Family Involvement Trainings: The state Department of Public Instruction partnered with Wisconsin’s Responsive Education for All Children initiative to make community involvement training available to parents and school administrators across the state. The trainings were held in 12 locations with more than 300 participants. The trainings helped schools identify their current family involvement practices, challenges they faced to involve the community, and ways current practices can help address the challenges. Based on the training, participants began working on their school’s one-year action plan regarding partnerships. In addition, the state is looking into using web-based conferences to provide additional support to participants after the trainings.

Maryland School, Family and Community Partnership Trainings: The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) partnered with its Parent Information Resource Center to provide trainings across the state to encourage better partnerships between parents, educators, and the community. The trainings focused on district and school parent involvement plans and required each school or district team to have at least one principal, teacher, and parent to come to the meeting.
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District and school teams had the opportunity to share their respective involvement plans as well as challenges they faced. Trainings included an overview of parent involvement, school-level plans, and strategies to overcome challenges. The MSDE also illustrated promising practices across the state that encourage partnerships.

Connecticut School-Family-Community Partnerships Program: The Connecticut State Department of Education piloted its partnerships program in three districts in the state. The goal of the pilots was to create sustainable parent involvement regardless of changing school and parent leaders. Support included creation of Action Teams for Partnerships, along with trainings for schools. Action Teams helped develop school-based plans for partnerships linked to school goals for students. In addition, a District Quality Council was established. The Council consists of district leaders, school representatives, parents, board members, and community partners. The Council worked to oversee the implementation of the Action Team plans within each school.

Questions for Reflection:

- Does your state have a professional development, training, and technical assistance plan with corresponding activities for all educators, administrators, and school personnel on how to identify and support students at-risk of dropping out?

- Does your state have a professional development, training, and technical assistance plan with corresponding activities for all educators, administrators, and school personnel on how to engage and work with families and community organizations?

- Does your state have a mechanism to inform educators, administrators, and school personnel of best practice models and strategies on dropout prevention and school-community partnerships?

Resources

- America’s Promise Alliance produced a guide titled Grad Nation: A Guidebook to Help Communities Tackle the Dropout Crisis (www.americaspromise.org). The guide focuses on ways communities can help students prepare for life after

Elements of Effective Technical Assistance

- Relationships are ongoing and collegial. Frequent contact and mutual respect are encouraged when technical assistance is provided in peer-to-peer models, when providers come from the community where the initiative is located, or when they are of the same ethnic or racial background as staff and families.

- Content is based on a clear understanding of the initiative’s purposes and strategies. Technical assistance reflects specific needs and focuses on core questions that the initiative wishes to address. Technical assistance is based on a broad range of research and practice-based information, but consistently keeps the initiative grounded in its own vision.

- Delivery is structured around a clear framework agreed to by the initiative. It draws on a wide menu of approaches and tools. The pace is varied and providers are flexible. They know when to step back, when to push, and when to revisit important issues. They also make sure that initiative staff are in charge of deciding the next steps.

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high school. It provides tools on a variety of issues in dropout prevention, as well as research-based strategies to use.

- The **Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships** ([www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm](http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm)) is an initiative at Johns Hopkins University that helps schools, districts, and states integrate research-based strategies to develop and maintain community involvement in schools. Each year, the Center highlights successful strategies that range from literacy and math to district- and state-level practices that have been shown to increase community involvement and improve student success.

- The **Coalition for Community Schools** ([www.communityschools.org](http://www.communityschools.org)) provides research, resources, and insights into the benefits and opportunities that community involvement can have on student outcomes. One such resource is a community-involvement self-assessment tool, available at [www.communityschools.org/assessmentnew.pdf](http://www.communityschools.org/assessmentnew.pdf).

- Communities in Schools ([www.cisnet.org](http://www.cisnet.org)) works to prevent high school dropout through school-community partnerships. To accomplish this goal, the organization links the needs of schools to resources available in the community.

- The **Everyone Graduates Center** ([www.every1graduates.org](http://www.every1graduates.org)) seeks to identify obstacles that prevent students from graduating from high school and being prepared for adult success. The Center develops strategies, tools, and resources to address these obstacles and helps policymakers build capacity to sustain the efforts.

- The **Forum for Youth Investment** ([www.forumfyi.org](http://www.forumfyi.org)) is helping communities ensure that all youth are prepared for college, work, and life through the **Ready by 21** campaign. The Forum uses research and technical assistance to communities to accomplish this goal.

- The **High School Reform Strategy Toolkit** ([www.highschooltoolkit.com](http://www.highschooltoolkit.com)) presents policymakers with research on strategies and initiatives related to both community involvement and dropout.

- The **National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools** ([www.sedl.org/connections/](http://www.sedl.org/connections/)) has a full set of tools to help increase community involvement for student success. The Center provides an up-to-date synthesis on research and practice in the field, as well as strategies to engage communities.

- The **National Dropout Prevention Center** ([www.dropoutprevention.org](http://www.dropoutprevention.org)) works to increase graduation rates by providing resources and research-backed strategies. In addition, the Center has a Model Programs database that includes over 150 programs and research results on the effectiveness of these programs.

- The **U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences** developed the **What Works Clearinghouse** and **Regional Educational Laboratory Program** ([ies.ed.gov](http://ies.ed.gov)) to provide rigorous investigation of education programs. The Clearinghouse highlights programs, policies, and practices that evaluations show to be effective interventions, while the ten laboratories investigate education issues specific to the region through rigorous research.
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**RECOMMENDATION 5:**
Create multiple pathways to graduation and opportunities to gain and apply knowledge and skills (e.g., through service learning or career technical courses) that will require strategic school-community partnerships.

Not all students learn the same way and not all students will go to college. Some students need a second chance, while other students need additional support that cannot be provided in a traditional setting. Even with highly effective dropout programs, some students will not be on track and will need alternative pathways to succeed. Thus, curriculum and instruction cannot be cookie cutters and applied to all students in the same manner.

Creating multiple pathways to graduation provides opportunities for more students to graduate while at the same time they obtain the necessary skills for postsecondary options. For example, through completion of Career Technical Education (CTE) courses and exams, some students not only obtain their diploma, they can also earn an industry certification that is recognized by potential employers.

Not all CTE courses earn an industry certification, however. Some offer students a chance to apply and learn new skills. For example, many schools have health occupations courses where students shadow doctors and nurses at a hospital. These courses teach students basic workforce skills and etiquette, such as professional behavior and attire, while applying lessons learned from their science courses.

In addition, CTE courses provide an opportunity for business leaders and career professionals to become engaged with student learning. They can, for example:

- Co-teach CTE courses with a certified teacher;
- Provide job shadowing opportunities;
- Give students who complete their certification a guaranteed interview; and
- Assist the state in developing a curriculum that prepares students for work.

Service learning is another opportunity for community engagement that enriches student learning. Through service learning, students not only apply the skills they learn in the classroom, they also give back to their communities. For example, students may be required to tend to a community garden (another chance for students to apply lessons from their science courses). Studies conducted on student learning programs have found they have a positive effect on dropout, academic achievement, and civic engagement.51

**State Examples**

In 2007, Louisiana repealed a policy that barred the use of proficiency tests to earn credit for classes that a student had previously failed in an effort to help at-risk students in credit recovery and get them back on track for graduation. In June 2009, the legislature approved a measure that allows students to earn a “career diploma” that emphasizes technical skills. In addition, Louisiana students can earn an industry certification that is recognized by potential employers.

Northeast State Community College in Tennessee partners with local high schools to offer students technical education credits they can apply toward a high school diploma.

To help students prepare for the workforce, Alabama recently expanded its worker certification program into their high schools. Students can now earn a nationally recognized...
Alabama Career Readiness Certificate while earning their high school diploma. The certificates will show that students are proficient in applied mathematics, reading for information, and locating information.

As part of its high school graduation requirements, Maryland requires service learning from all students. An additional eight states (Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin) permit community service or service-learning activities to be applied toward high school graduation requirements.52

**Questions for Reflection:**

- Does your state have policies and programs that allow students to earn college credit and industry certification while also obtaining a high school diploma?

- How does your state assist districts and schools in reengaging students who have already dropped out?

- What policies or programs does your state have to provide opportunities for students to apply what they have learned?

- How do community leaders engage with your districts and schools? Are they involved with policymaking or curriculum development?

- Does your state have policies that support and regulate the practice of service learning?

**Resources**

- The National High School Center developed “Preparing High School Students for Successful Transitions to Postsecondary Education and Employment” (www.betterhighschools.com/docs/PreparingHSStudentsforTransition_073108.pdf) as a resource for state and local systems to use in increasing student success beyond high school. State recommendations include aligning high school curricula with expectations postsecondary institutions and employers have for youth, providing incentives to align K-12 and postsecondary planning, as well as developing financial aid systems to give students incentives to graduate from postsecondary institutions rather than merely attending them.

- The Pathways to College Network developed the College Readiness for All Toolbox (toolbox.pathwaystocollege.net) to assist educators and policymakers in preparing all students for postsecondary education. The Toolbox provides a research-backed model, resources, and guidance for reaching this goal.

- Learn and Serve America’s National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (www.servicelearning.org/) provides research, fact sheets, resources for students, parents, and teachers, and toolkits, as well as service learning ideas and curricular examples.
## The Role of School-Community Partnerships in Dropout Prevention

### Table 3. Examples of Federal School-Community Partnerships Initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Participation Per Year</th>
<th>Summary of Program</th>
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| Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC) | Air Force JROTC – 102,000 Students  
Army JROTC – 281,000 Students  
Navy JROTC – 81,505 Students  
Coast Guard JROTC – 549 Students  
Marine JROTC – Unknown  
Total Enrollment w/o Marines – Approximately 465,000 Students | • Funded through the Department of Defense to instruct students on the value of citizenship, service and personal responsibility  
• Focus on at-risk youth by maintaining at least 20 percent of programs in educationally and economically deprived areas  
• Works with schools and organizations to develop projects focused on needs within the community such as HIV prevention, school supplies drives and community restoration  
• Helps students in core academic subjects outside of school hours  
• Provides literacy and education services to student’s families  
• Many centers provide mentoring programs for students, drug and violence prevention programs, as well as career counseling as ways to engage students and the community  
• Grant-based program that involves students through the service-based learning  
• Service-learning includes projects that meet the needs of the community, coordinated with the school and community, and integrates academic curriculum  
• Maintains the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse which provides research and best practices to support service-learning programs and practitioners  
• Works with dropout youth between the ages of 16 and 18 who participate in an intensive 20-week program  
• After completion, youth get paired with a significant adult in their life who is trained by ChalleNGE to mentor them as they transition back into the community, including assistance with job placement or post-secondary education  
• Work in schools to help parents understand accountability systems for their student, communicate effectively with teachers and administrators and become active participants in their child’s education  
• Focus on low-income communities |
| 21st Century Community Learning Centers | 1.7 Million Students | • Help students in core academic subjects outside of school hours  
• Provide literacy and education services to student’s families  
• Many centers provide mentoring programs for students, drug and violence prevention programs, as well as career counseling as ways to engage students and the community |
| Learn and Serve America | 130,000 Students | • Grant-based program that involves students through the service-based learning  
• Service-learning includes projects that meet the needs of the community, coordinated with the school and community, and integrates academic curriculum  
• Maintains the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse which provides research and best practices to support service-learning programs and practitioners |
| National Guard Youth ChalleNGE | 8,000 Students | • Works with dropout youth between the ages of 16 and 18 who participate in an intensive 20-week program  
• After completion, youth get paired with a significant adult in their life who is trained by ChalleNGE to mentor them as they transition back into the community, including assistance with job placement or post-secondary education |
| Parental Information Resource Centers | 56 Million Families | • Work in schools to help parents understand accountability systems for their student, communicate effectively with teachers and administrators and become active participants in their child’s education  
• Focus on low-income communities |
Endnotes


2. Education Policy Center, Baltimore City's High School Reform Initiative: Schools, Students, and Outcomes (Washington, DC: Education Policy Center, The Urban Institute, 2007).


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26. Ibid.

27. For more information on the Black Star Project, please visit www.blackstarrproject.org.


33. The sites included Austin Interfaith (Austin, TX), Chicago ACORN (Chicago, IL), Community Coalition (Los Angeles, CA), Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project (Philadelphia, PA), Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (Bronx, NY), Oakland Community Organizations (Oakland, CA), and People Acting for Community Together (Miami, FL).


35. Ibid.


Teams to School-Community Higher Education Connections (Los Angeles, CA: Author, 2008).

41. Sanders, Building School-Community Partnerships (2006)

42. Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, Working Collaboratively.


47. Dakarai I. Aarons, “Florida Schools Steer by Numbers: Data Warehouse Tracks Key College-Going Markers,” Education Week (June 11, 2009).


52. Ibid.


54. Ibid.


59. Ibid.


61. Ibid.
