

**Reference Desk Response No. 103:
High School Dropout Prevention**

Question:

1. What does the research say about the effectiveness of dropout prevention programs administered to at-risk youth at earlier high school grade levels (e.g., 9th grade) compared to later grade levels?
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Report:

We conducted a search for rigorous research reports in this area. The sources included federally funded organizations, additional research centers and several educational research databases. Our results include literature reviews, journal articles, and lists of resources. We also searched for appropriate organizations that may act as a resource for your concerns. We have not done an evaluation of these organizations ourselves, but offer this list to you for your information only.

The resources below stress the early identification of students who are at-risk of dropping out. The research suggests that dropout prevention programs as early as middle school can be effective.

Question:

1. **What does the research say about the effectiveness of dropout prevention programs administered to at-risk youth at earlier high school grade levels (e.g., 9th grade) compared to later grade levels?**

1.1. What the Research Says (or Doesn't Say): Ninth-Grade Support Systems. *Klump, J.; Winter 2008; Northwest Education; Vol. 13; No. 2.*

Source: Northwest Regional Education Laboratory.

(<http://www.nwrel.org/nwedu/13-02/research.php>)

The author cites research that indicates "ninth grade as the 'make it or break it year' for being on track to graduate." "Studies of Chicago public schools indicate that students who did not have enough credits as freshmen, often due to course failure, were less likely to graduate." The report also observes that "students who repeated ninth grade were still more likely to drop out."

1.2. Research Sheds Light on the Students Most at Risk of Dropping Out – and How to Keep Students on the "Graduation Track". *Education Commission of the States; July 2007; The Progress of Education Reform 2007: Dropout Prevention; Vol. 8; No. 1.*

Source: Education Commission of the States.

(<http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/75/33/7533.pdf>)

From page 2, "The large numbers of students who fall off the graduation track early in the middle grades clearly require substantial and sustained supports to become engaged in schooling and successfully pass their courses." The resource suggests that educators "establish interventions for failing students before their second year of high school" and "consider implementing higher level measures of progress at a higher level of performance – such as whether students are acquiring the skills they will eventually need to do well in advanced classes, or to prepare for college or work."

1.3. Impacts of Dropout Prevention Programs. *Dynarksi, M., Gleason, P., Rangarajan, A., & Wood, R.; June 1998; A Research Report from the School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program Evaluation; MPR Reference No.: 8014.*

Source: National High School Center.

(<http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/dod-fr.pdf>)

The National High School center summarizes this resource by writing “this study evaluated 16 dropout programs for middle and high school students under the School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program (SDDP). The study found that middle school programs had a significant effect in reducing drop out only if they were implemented with high intensity. The programs, regardless of intensity, did not have an impact on student learning (e.g., grades, test scores). The high school programs, however, did not have an impact on reducing dropout, improving other school outcomes (e.g., test scores, grades), or improving social-behavioral outcomes (e.g., reducing pregnancy, increasing self-esteem).”

1.4. Approaches to Dropout Prevention: Heeding Early Warning Signs With Appropriate Interventions. Kennelly, L. & Monrad, M.; October 2007; National High School Center at the American Institutes for Research.

Source: National High School Center.

(http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_ApproachesToDropoutPrevention.pdf)

The report states on page 1 that “to be most effective in preventing dropout, school systems should focus dropout prevention efforts in the beginning of the middle grades.” The report also states that “most future dropouts can also be identified in the first year of high school when a sense of urgency around reaching out and supporting these students is critical before they disappear from school.”

1.5. Intervention: Twelve Together. U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences; March 12, 2007; WWC Intervention Report.

Source: What Works Clearinghouse.

(http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/WWC_Twelve_Together_031207.pdf)

From page 3, the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) “review of interventions for dropout prevention addresses student outcomes in three domains: staying in school, progressing in school, and completing school.” The *Twelve Together* program “is a one-year peer support and mentoring program for middle and early high school students that offers weekly after-school discussion groups led by trained volunteer adult facilitators. “One study of *Twelve Together* met the WWC evidence standards with reservations. The study was a randomized controlled trial that included 219 eighth-grade students in nine middle schools in one California school district.” The WWC reports that “*Twelve Together* was found to have potentially positive effects on staying in school and no discernible effects on progressing in school.”

Additional Organizations to Consult

- **What Works Clearinghouse: Dropout Prevention**

(<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/topic.aspx?tid=06>)

“The WWC offers a range of publications that evaluate school and community-based dropout prevention interventions and instructional strategies for middle and/or high schools. Reviewed interventions and strategies are designed to help students stay in school and/or complete school and may include services and activities that mitigate factors impeding progress in school.”

- **National Dropout Prevention Center/Network**

(<http://www.dropoutprevention.org>)

“The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) was begun in 1986 to serve as a clearinghouse on issues related to dropout prevention and to offer strategies designed to increase the graduation rate in America's schools. In addition, the NDPC/N conducts a variety of third party evaluations and Program Assessment and Reviews (PAR).”

- **Database of Dropout Prevention Programs**

(<http://www.relnei.org/research/educational.dropoutdb.php>)

A database to generate and share knowledge about dropout programs and policies implemented in nine midsize urban school districts.

Resources on Dropout Prevention in General

- **National High School Center Research Studies: Dropout Prevention.** *National High School Center; August 19, 2008.*
(<http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/ResearchNHSCDO10-01-08.pdf>)
This study/resource provides a list of research on dropout prevention. "The research pieces included in this document have been vetted using the National High School Center's research review criteria and received a score of 3 or 2. Further explanation of the criteria is available at <http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/ResearchReviewCriteria09232008.pdf>."
- **Dropout Prevention.** *Dynarski, M., Cobb, B., Finn, J., et. al.; September 2008; IES Practice Guide, U.S. Department of Education; NCES 2008-4025.*
Source: Institute for Education Sciences
(http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/dp_pg_090308.pdf)
"Geared toward educators, administrators, and policymakers, this guide provides recommendations that focus on reducing high school dropout rates. Strategies presented include identifying and advocating for at-risk students, implementing programs to improve behavior and social skills, and keeping students engaged in the school environment."
- **Early Warning System Tool (Excel file).** *Heppen, J.B., O'Cummings, M., Bowles Therriault, S.; July 2008; National High School Center.*
Source: Center on Innovation and Improvement.
(<http://www.betterhighschools.org/pubs/EWStool.xls>)
"This tool allows educators to input student-level data and automatically calculate whether individual students are on track to graduate or at risk of dropping out. (Please maximize the document's screen in Excel in order to access all the spreadsheet tabs in the tool.)"

Key words and search strings used in the search:

Dropout prevention, Early high school dropout prevention, Early high school dropout intervention,

Search databases and websites:

Sources For Rigorous Research Reports: Regional Educational Laboratory Program (REL); What Works Clearinghouse (WWC); Doing What Works (DWW); National Center for Education Statistics (NCES); Institute for Education Sciences (IES); The Campbell Collaboration; Data Quality Campaign; IES Practice Guides

Other Federally Funded Sites: The National High School Center; The Center on Innovation and Improvement; The Center on Instruction; The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality; National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Datasets: K – 12; National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP); National Household Education Survey (NHES); Common Core of Data (CCD); Crime and Safety Data; Education Finance Statistics Center (EFSC/EDFIN); Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS); National Longitudinal Studies (NLS-72, HS&B, NELS:88); Private School Universe Survey (PSS); Center for Data-Driven Reform in Education (CDDRE); National Center for Research on Early Childhood Education; National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing; National Research Center on Rural Education Support; National Research and Development Center for English Language Learners; National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities; Access Center for Improving Outcomes for All Students K-8; National Dropout Prevention Center/Network; National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities; Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement; National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning; Education Commission of the States; Regional Comprehensive Centers; Equity Centers; Regional Resource Centers

Additional Data Resources: Education Development Center; WestEd; American Institutes for Research; Just for Kids; The Education Trust; SRI International; ERIC; Education Index Retrospective; FirstSearch (OCLC); ProQuest; Educator's Reference Complete; Education Daily; Government Executive; <http://www.google.com>;

REL Northeast and Islands

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