

**COLORADO DROPOUT  
PREVENTION RESEARCH  
SYNTHESES**



# ON-TRACK/EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

## Colorado Dropout Prevention Framework



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*Systematically review data to identify students showing signs of being at risk of dropping out of high school or not meeting post-high school outcomes, understand what leads to elevated signs of risk, and provide targeted supports to students.*

On-Track/Early Warning Systems (EWS<sup>1</sup>) use local and historical data and research-based indicators to help identify students showing signs of risk for missing key educational milestones, including on-time high school graduation and postsecondary readiness. Early warning indicator data are used with other sources of data and insights from people (including students) to help understand underlying student needs.

Most EWS collect data on three essential indicators that research has shown are most predictive of risk for not graduating, often referred to as the ABCs of early warning data:

- **Attendance:** In middle school: missing 9 days/quarter (or 36 days/year). In high school: missing 10% of instructional time.
- **Behavior:** Two or more mild or more serious behavior infractions.
- **Course Performance:** In sixth through eighth grades: failure in English or math, a grade point average of less than 2.0. In ninth through 12th grades: any course failure, failure to pass the ninth grade.

An EWS efficiently and systematically reviews data to identify students who show signs of being at risk of dropping out and is connected to a multi-level intervention and response system. Districts and schools using EWS may also expand on these indicators to include social-emotional learning or whole child measure, such as student belonging or connectedness, or specific benchmarks toward postsecondary readiness such as participation in an internship or advanced coursework to help inform strategies. The real power of an EWS is the ability to proactively act on these predictive data to match interventions to needs so as to get students back on track or stay on track for on-time graduation and postsecondary readiness. EWS depend on all relevant stakeholders having easily accessible and timely data as well as user-friendly tools or dashboards (including adequate licensing and access rights for technology).



### How EWS Supports Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement

- Monitoring student data through early warning indicator data consistently identifies students showing signs of risk for not graduating on time (McKee & Caldarella, 2016; Balfanz et al., 2007; Faria et al., 2017).
- Reviewing early warning indicator data regularly to intervene quickly can offer support to students before more intensive recovery efforts are needed (Lovelace et al., 2017; Corrin et al., 2016).
- Using indicators in attendance, course performance, and behavior is more predictive of student outcomes than demographics, socio-economic status, and other environmental factors historically used to identify students (Baker et al., 2019).

Learn more about the research behind this strategy in the *EWS Research Synthesis*.

<sup>1</sup> The acronym EWS is used throughout the framework to refer to both on-track and early warning systems.

## Implementation Considerations

The following considerations are provided to inform district and school planning and implementation of the EWS strategy.

**Strengthen Foundational Practices.** The five foundational practices in the Colorado Dropout Prevention Framework guide districts and schools in building systems and practices that directly support this strategy. The review of data within an EWS can help inform the implementation of foundational practices. Review the *Dropout Prevention Foundational Practices and Strategies Crosswalk* for more information.

**Adopt Responsive and Actionable Data Systems.** Districts and schools can respond to student needs more quickly and effectively by structuring data systems so the right people can access the right data at the right time. Developing the technical and analytical skills of educators and key stakeholders (e.g., parents/guardians, students) enables teams to access, organize, and analyze systemic student data that help students be successful.

EWS require a way to organize and visualize early warning indicator data, typically through a tool or dashboard. Visualizing the data allows teams to quickly identify which students or groups of students are showing elevated signs of risk. Ideally the tool or dashboard is integrated with existing school data systems. As schools adopt responsive and actionable data systems, considerations include:

- Using a program or dashboard to organize and display early warning indicator data that is user-friendly, allows for data aggregation and disaggregation, and is updated regularly.
- Providing access rights (including teachers, parents/guardians, and students, as appropriate) to the data program and set-up for use of necessary features and/or building opportunities for awareness of data
- Ensuring data are “real-time” or up to date as much as possible.
- Coordinating or integrating with related school data systems for deeper data analysis and use of trend data to examine more systemic interventions or initiatives.

**Strengthen Human Practices, Processes, and Mindsets.** EWS depend on individuals, teams of people, and entire school communities to understand, support, and carry out the practices and processes needed to make use of early warning indicator data. Educators and stakeholders depend on human systems and practices to respond to student needs, adjust adult practices and policies, and monitor how the system is being implemented.

The early warning indicator data, in combination with additional data from school data systems and stakeholder insights, help school teams identify areas to focus their investigation and understand underlying student needs, and match those students to supports. For example, knowing that a student has failed mathematics is not enough information to assign a responsive intervention. Rather, taking the time to speak with the student, the teacher, parents/guardians, and then reviewing attendance data and the student’s other class grades, may show that the student missed key instructional days due to absences.

As *schools* develop practices, processes, and mindsets to support EWS implementation, considerations include:

### Implementation Considerations

- Strengthen Foundational Practices
- Adopt Responsive and Actionable Data Systems
- Strengthen Human Practices, Processes, and Mindsets
- Use Responsive Supports and Actions

### Implementation Tools and Resources

- [Indicators & Interventions: A Practical Manual for Early Warning Systems](#)
- [A Practitioner’s Guide to Implementing Early Warning Systems](#)
- [Early Warning Intervention and Monitoring System Implementation Guide](#)
- [Three Circle of Evidence-Based Decision Making to Support Students with Disabilities](#)
- [Measuring Fidelity](#)
- [GRAD Partnership Self-Reflection Tool](#)

- Establishing a representative school team that meets frequently, and has the agency to engage in decision making rooted in data analysis.
- Using a data-based decision-making process or protocol to examine school and stakeholder data and input (including teachers, parents/guardians, and students) to uncover the root causes of why a student shows signs of elevated risk and where intervention may be most effective.
- Involving parents/guardians in understanding and addressing student needs throughout the process.
- Creating a process to monitor and follow up on student progress with interventions and supports.
- Engaging in continuous improvement cycles to examine school and team processes and trends in data in the EWS that may inform schoolwide practices.
- Approaching students with a strengths-based mindset.

Districts support implementation of human practices, processes, and mindsets by emphasizing the importance of using a systemic review of early warning indicator data to identify trends and individual students showing signs of risk. Districts can seek to understand needs and commonalities across schools to facilitate sharing resources and ideas. For example, in learning that one school is having success with a reading program that meets a need that is emerging from another school, the district can help to connect those individuals and resources.

**Use Responsive Supports and Actions.** EWS only works when actions are taken based on what is learned from early warning indicator data and deeper investigation into underlying student needs. Students have to be matched to and provided with interventions or supports that address their underlying needs, and trends need to inform whole school strategy and initiatives. These interventions and supports are most effective when aligned with a tiered response system. Alignment can provide a comprehensive approach to student supports and adult actions that are consistent across teams, grade levels, departments, and the entire school.

As schools develop systems to support students, or ensure integration with existing systems such as MTSS, considerations include:

- Assigning students to interventions that address underlying needs in response to signs of risk through the predictive indicators.
- Developing a comprehensive intervention catalogue of appropriate and available interventions aligned to student needs.
- Aligning supports and interventions with a multi-tiered framework and ensuring student supports are in response to early warning indicator data.
- Using early warning indicator data to both identify supports and interventions for individual schools and also school-level trends to inform improvements to practices across the school.
- Examining school systems and adult behaviors so they support student success (such as written and implemented policy, curriculum, and administrator practices).

Districts also play a role in how practices and policies (e.g., adult mindsets, instructional practices, district and school policies) impact implementation to address barriers related to adult action and systems. Districts support implementation of EWS by working to understand available interventions and student needs. This information can then be used to (1) facilitate sharing interventions and learning across schools, (2) identify additional supports to close existing gaps, (3) help reduce redundancies in current offerings, and (4) provide infrastructure (such as software) and training.

## Equitable Implementation of Early Warning Systems

Equitable implementation is the integration of “strong equity components, including explicit attention to the languages, cultures, histories, values, assets, and needs of different communities, during all steps of an implementation process” (Metz et al., 2020, p. 8).

Using a data-based systemic approach to identify students showing signs of being at risk for not graduating can contribute to district and school efforts in providing equitable support of students. The use of research-based early warning indicators in this approach is more predictive of risk than student characteristics, demographics, or relying on referrals, and leads to a more equitable allocation of supports and resources.

To support equitable implementation, districts and schools can consider the EWS strategy through the lens of equity in access, representation, and quality.

**Equity in Access.** What processes or practices need to be in place to ensure school teams have access to and use an early warning system?

- Use indicators in attendance, course performance, and behavior to identify students showing signs of risk. Examine trends to help inform action, including if some groups of students are overrepresented.
- Create or purchase a tool to make accessing and analyzing indicator data accessible and user-friendly and provide access (including licensing) to relevant users/stakeholders.
- Ensure broad understanding of EWS team purpose, intended outcomes, and integration with school practices and other school teams.
- Ensure all students, regardless of previous data, have access to intervention and support.

**Equity in Representation.** What processes or practices need to be put in place to ensure school team representation reflects the demographics of the student population and community in early warning systems?

- Create teams that represent the school community.
- Include students, teachers, parents/guardians, and community stakeholders in conversations for authentic engagement and deeper understanding.
- Analyze current student behavior and school pattern data to identify individual and group trends and examine policy and practices that ensure all student groups have opportunities for successful outcomes.

**Equity in Quality.** What processes or practices need to be put in place to ensure school team effective use of an early warning system?

- Follow data review protocols regularly.
- Review universal and tiered supports to ensure they are responsive to current student populations/needs year to year. Available supports address needs related to (at a minimum) attendance, behavior, and course performance, and align with the MTSS.
- Assign students to available interventions that respond to underlying needs and that are culturally and linguistically responsive.
- Track progress of students related to interventions.

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# MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO GRADUATION

## Colorado Dropout Prevention Framework



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*Design pathways to provide students with clearly defined opportunities to customize their education to meet their unique needs and circumstances and gain real-world knowledge, skills, and experiences leading to high school and postsecondary success.*

Pathways are structured academic and work based learning opportunities that increase the relevance and alignment of learning experiences to student interests and postsecondary education and workforce skills and goals by providing targeted and personalized instructional and learning programs. This can include pathways for students who are missing previous learning. Developing multiple pathways requires programs, schools, or systems that are tailored to student interest, postsecondary education and workforce opportunity, and community need. Pathways are intended to increase opportunities for success by providing students with options and increase agency in their own learning through rigorous, relevant, and supportive approaches to learning.

Pathways build personalized experiences and make real-life connections between school and career options. Sometimes a pathway is a sequence of courses, sometimes it is applied learning opportunities within the same course, and sometimes it connects students with real-life or skills-based learning outside the classroom. Regardless of structure, all pathways should provide rigorous instruction and include core principles of student success, such as positive relationships with caring adults, quality instruction, opportunities to engage in learning experiences that connect life beyond school, as well as support and resources to help students explore postsecondary education and workforce options. Pathway programs in Colorado include: [Career and Technical Education](#) (courses and certifications); [Work-based Learning](#) (job opportunities and work training); [Innovative Learning Opportunities](#) Pilot Program (blend of in-person, off-campus, or outside of the classroom opportunities); [Concurrent Enrollment](#); [Early College High School](#); [Colorado P-TECH](#); [Online and Blended Learning](#); and [Alternative Education](#) programs or schools

In designing pathways, districts need to align to Colorado graduation requirements and should refer to and discuss local board policy with district leadership. In Colorado, three specific requirements are outlined in state statutes and board rules. All other graduation requirements are determined by local school board policy. The three requirements are:

- Civics: All students receiving a diploma must pass one [course in civics](#).
- [Holocaust and Genocide Studies](#): All students receiving a diploma must pass one course that incorporates Holocaust and genocide studies.
- [Graduation Guidelines](#): All students receiving a diploma must demonstrate readiness for college and career based on at least one measure in reading, writing, and communicating; and one measure in mathematics.



### How Multiple Pathways to Graduation Support Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement

- Programs and curricula targeted at increasing the relevance of school can help prevent disengagement and reconnect students with relevant content (Rose & Bowen, 2021).
- Pathways that are connected to postsecondary career and education opportunities engage students in learning and provide a clear path after graduation (Dougherty, 2021; Heinrich, 2021; NCES, 2013; U.S. Ed, 2019).
- Multiple pathways can be leveraged as a schoolwide approach as well as serve as an intervention for individual students (Gottfried & Plasman, 2018; Phelps & Chan, 2016; Stipanovic et al., 2017).
- For students who are behind, pathways can provide a clear direction and needed scaffolds for high school and secondary success (Frost, 2016; Rix, 2022).

Learn more about the research behind this strategy in the *Multiple Pathways to Graduation Research Synthesis*



## Implementation Considerations

The following considerations are provided to inform district and school planning and implementation of the Multiple Pathways to Graduation strategy.

**Strengthen Foundational Practices.** The five foundational practices in the Colorado Dropout Prevention Framework guide districts and schools in building systems and practices that directly support this strategy. Review the *Dropout Prevention Foundational Practices and Strategies Crosswalk* for more information.

**Develop Multiple Pathways.** Districts can provide multiple pathways to graduation. Some pathways may be more universal and aimed at redesigning systems to meet the needs of large groups of students (e.g., career and technical education (CTE) pathways, academy structures, or alternative education programs or schools), while other pathways may work in current structures (e.g., work-based learning, innovative learning options, theme-based courses or course sequences, college credit in high school, career planning).

Using data (including needs assessments) as a guide, district leaders can develop pathways that allow students to customize their education to meet their unique needs and circumstances while accessing relevant experiences in which they gain real-world knowledge and skills. For example:

- CTE programs or other real-world learning experiences may provide direct skill-building opportunities that keep students engaged or to reengage students who would otherwise drop out.
- Schools and districts may consider flexible scheduling, including evening and weekend classes and work-based learning credit, to recognize students who are working and keep them engaged in learning.
- Schools and districts may build programs for career exploration and planning to help students better understand options, identify goals, and create plans for success.
- Schools and districts may build schools (e.g., career academies, early college whole school model) or programs to help students who are behind in credits.

When developing and implementing pathway programs, it is important for districts and schools to consider the needs of their special populations including, but not limited to, differently abled students, pregnant or parenting teens, homeless students, or students who have been incarcerated. When schools and districts provide students with options, students may then customize their education pathway to meet their unique needs and circumstances and gain real-world knowledge, skills, and experiences.

**Connect Students to Appropriate Pathways.** Districts and schools will also need to design systems to connect students to the appropriate pathways and to ensure that student's previous learning doesn't entirely limit their future access opportunities. CDE's [Office of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness](#) (PWR) provides supports and resources to help schools work through the personalization of a pathway through high school and to college and/or career for each student.

A key resource to help connect students to relevant pathways is the use of an [Individual Career and Academic Plan](#) (ICAP). The ICAP process guides students and families in the exploration of career, academic, and postsecondary opportunities. The [PWR Playbook](#) includes key guidance, examples, and resources to support districts and schools in

### Implementation Considerations

- Strengthen Foundational Practices
- Develop Multiple Pathways
- Connect Students to Appropriate Pathways

### Implementation Tools and Resources

- [Competency-Based Learning School-Design Rubric](#)
- [What Is Competency-Based Education? An Updated Definition](#)
- [Work-Based Learning Implementation Guide](#)
- [Career and Technical Education: An Evidence-Based Dropout Prevention Strategy](#)



implementing the ICAP process, including a [searchable database](#) of tools and resources developed by Colorado districts and schools. In addition to using ICAP as a universal strategy to support students in exploring personalized pathways through high school, districts and schools should also leverage existing systems such as EWS and MTSS to proactively identify students who may be in need of additional supports, and to explore whether alternative pathways may be appropriate and effective in meeting their needs.

### Equitable Implementation of Multiple Pathways to Graduation

Implementing multiple pathways to graduation that are focused on producing equitable student outcomes requires strategic and intentional planning to target the unique needs of students. School communities need to collaborate and problem solve in determining student needs and finding solutions to fit those needs. Multiple pathways to graduation include programming that is regularly reviewed and modified for a student's unique situation from year to year.

To support equitable implementation of the Multiple Pathways to Graduation strategy, districts and schools can consider the strategy through the lens of equity in access, representation, and quality.

**Equity in Access.** What processes or practices need to be in place to ensure students have equitable access to and participate in available pathways?

- Develop inclusive recruitment strategies in partnership with students and families.
- Prioritize positive student and family outreach that includes focusing on groups that have not previously participated.
- Set clear participation targets.
- Intentionally and seamlessly integrate ICAP in school curriculum beginning as early as the sixth grade.
- Analyze policies and build in planning process such as ICAP to ensure that all students have access, even those with previous low performance.

**Equity in Representation.** What processes or practices need to be put in place to ensure student representation across pathways reflects the demographics of the overall student population?

- Collect and routinely examine participation data for over- and under-representation of student groups and engage students to capture input about barriers to access and engagement.
- Examine data from early warning systems to determine appropriate interventions based on root cause that targets increasing participation and engagement of traditionally marginalized students and provides multiple entry points for students.
- To the extent possible, avoid ability tracking or grouping students in ways that will result in de facto segregated pathways (e.g., specific subgroups of students overrepresented in college-bound pathways).

**Equity in Quality.** What processes or practices need to be put in place to ensure students are provided high-quality experiences in these pathways that are meaningful, meet rigorous standards, and adequately prepare students for college and/or career?

- Develop clear standards, expectations, and support for pathway experiences.
- Collect and routinely examine data from employers and community partners about pathway experiences.
- Collect data from students about pathway experiences.

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# COUNSELING THE WHOLE CHILD

## Colorado Dropout Prevention Framework



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*Develop data-driven, systemic school counseling programs and connections to intensive supports to encourage students in meeting academic, career, and personal development goals.*

Robust school counseling programs include multiple layers of support designed to strategically and effectively respond to student academic, social-emotional learning (SEL), and mental health needs. They work in combination with supportive school cultures and relationships that embrace the importance of shared responsibility for student success and safety. School counselors, mental health providers, and support staff who carry out the mission and goals of school counseling programs have a unique opportunity to understand, identify, and assist students showing signs of dropout and disengagement. They play a critical role in developing and coordinating programs that integrate education, prevention, and intervention activities and serve as key connectors between students, parents/guardians, educators, and community members.

A data-driven, systemic school counseling program includes:

- Programs that are integrated across elementary, middle, and high schools to build alignment for student supports and services for postsecondary planning.
- Data use to identify students showing signs of being at risk for dropping out and support those students with necessary interventions.
- Schoolwide (Tier 1) student support efforts that include school counselors using comprehensive guidance or advisory curricula combined with SEL curricula.
- Systems to effectively triage students to appropriate services.
- Community partnerships to strengthen and broaden student supports.
- Mental health providers and/or effective partnerships with outside organizations to service students' mental health needs.
- Programs introducing counselors to students and parents/guardians as a supportive adult in the school environment.
- Parent/guardian training and community education sessions regarding effective student engagement and dropout prevention practices.
- Professional development activities for teachers and other staff on risk factors for dropping out, promising strategies for engaging and reengaging students, and effective ways of developing positive school climates.



### **How Counseling the Whole Child Supports Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement**

- School counselors play a critical role in leading a school's dropout prevention efforts as they are equipped with the tools to advocate for and intervene with students who show signs of risk of failing or dropping out (Webber, 2018; White & Kelly, 2010).
- School counseling programs can monitor student progress and use data to help meet student needs and address individual, school, or community factors that are linked with dropping out (Dahir & Cinotti, 2018; Tromski-Klingshirn & Miura, 2017).
- Interventions by school counselors before middle and high school can increase student engagement and prevent students from dropping out (Ecker-Lyster & Nileksela, 2016; What Works Clearinghouse, 2017).

Learn more about the research behind this strategy in the *Counseling the Whole Child Research Synthesis*.

## Implementation Considerations

The following considerations are provided to inform district and school planning and implementation of the Counseling the Whole Child strategy.

**Strengthen Foundational Practices.** The five foundational practices in the Colorado Dropout Prevention Framework guides districts and schools in building systems and practices that directly support this strategy. Review the *Dropout Prevention Foundational Practices and Strategies Crosswalk* for more information.

**Provide Individualized Student Support.** Individual support for proactive planning as well as intervention and response helps students navigate and succeed in a variety of situations. School counselors and other support staff work one-on-one with students to ensure students feel more connected to the school, have clear plans for their future, and have resources and supports when needed. School counselors should be involved in guiding the transition to high school, including the freshman orientation process, to ensure that students know who to go to when they may need additional help for both academic and personal reasons (Tromski-Klingshirn et al., 2017).

School counselors and school counseling programs are a critical first layer in effectively referring students to mental health providers who can provide more intensive supports. [CDE's School Safety and Crisis Resources](#) provides resources for school teams to better assist students who may be experiencing chronic stress and trauma. Furthermore, through the completion and utilization of the [Individual Career and Academic Plan](#) (ICAP) counselors can work with students and their families to capitalize on the utility of the ICAP to help keep students on track to graduate.

**Strengthen Counseling Programs.** Comprehensive school counseling programs are designed to guide all students through a systematic series of supports, connect students to needed outside services, and provide resources to ensure students are ready for postsecondary education. Hosting professional learning sessions to educate teachers, school and district leaders, and parents/guardians on dropout prevention contributes to productive engagement and a positive school climate. Counselors are a part of teams that are identifying and/or designing student-level support. CDE's [School Counselors and College Transition Specialists guide](#) provides school counselors with tools and best practices specific to dropout prevention and student engagement to support the development of counseling programs and CDE's School Counselor Corps Grant Program for districts needing funding to hire school counselors.

**Interweave Family, School, and Community Partnerships.** Counseling services are best implemented when they have the support of school and district leaders, students, and their parents/guardians. School counselors are among the first people many parents/guardians and students interact with when a student is struggling, making it their responsibility to connect students to those in the school community who can help get students back on track. School counselors can use a collaborative leadership approach to build these partnerships and collectively problem solve, meet program goals, get buy-in from stakeholders, and lead programs that contribute to dropout prevention efforts.

### Implementation Considerations

- Strengthen Foundational Practices
- Provide Individualized Student Support
- Strengthen Counseling Programs
- Interweave Family, School, and Community Partnerships

### Implementation Tools and Resources

- [ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies](#)
- [ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success](#)
- [COVID-19: Crisis & Mental Health Resources](#)
- [MTSS Resources](#)
- [A School Counselor's Guide to Promoting a Culture of Academic Success](#)
- [WWC Intervention Report: Check & Connect.](#)
- [ASCA Standards in Practice](#)

## Equitable Implementation of Counseling the Whole Child

Equitable counseling programs focus on the unique and changing student needs from year to year and support the development of staff to collectively meet student needs. To support equitable implementation of the Counseling the Whole Child strategy, districts and schools can consider the strategy through the lens of equity in access, representation, and quality.

**Equity in Access.** What processes or practices need to be in place to ensure students have equitable access to counseling programs?

- Ensure systematic implementation of individual and group efforts that impact all students.
- Set clear participation targets in activities based on student groups and grade levels.
- Conduct regular needs assessments to understand mental health and nonacademic needs and gaps in services.

**Equity in Representation.** What processes or practices need to be put in place to ensure school team representation reflects the demographics of the student population and community in counseling?

- Create a team that includes counselors and other support providers who represent the school community and understand individual student needs.
- Counseling programs and teams intentionally respond to the unique needs of individual students using a tiered model that targets the needs of students showing early warning signs of disengagement. School counselors are a core part of these teams.
- Counseling programs and teams have a clear system that allows them to quickly identify students who have disengaged or are at risk of disengagement and respond with evidence-based interventions.

**Equity in Quality.** What processes or practices need to be put in place to ensure students are provided high-quality experiences in school counseling that are meaningful and adequately prepare students for college and/or career?

- Develop clear standards and expectations for school counselors and the school counseling program.
- Develop defined roles for the need and expertise of mental health providers internal and external to the school.
- Analyze which students are served by which mental health providers to ensure that expertise meets individual student needs.
- Collect data from students about counseling experiences.
- Utilize ICAP to provide individual counseling to students showing early warning signs of disengagement.

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# PERSISTENCE, RECOVERY, AND REENGAGEMENT

## Colorado Dropout Prevention Framework



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*Develop programs to prepare students with the skills needed to successfully persist in graduating, allow students multiple methods for recovering content or credit when they have fallen behind, and identify students who have dropped out and support their transition back to school.*

In some cases, programs and interventions to support students who have already begun to disengage from the school system are needed to prevent a student from further disengaging or to reengage. These programs can be organized into three main categories:

- **Persistence.** Transition and summer bridge programs can help students as well as parents/guardians by providing social and academic support for students in new grades or new schools. This can be achieved through counseling and mentoring, goal setting and monitoring, teaching and practicing essential skills, family outreach, community engagement, and postsecondary and workplace readiness programming and training.
- **Recovery.** Credit and content recovery programs provide opportunities for students who have fallen behind the chance to “recover” content or credits and satisfy requirements for the courses in which they were unsuccessful by earning credit, often through different competency-based strategies.
- **Reengagement.** Student reengagement programs focus on reenrolling students who have dropped out of school. The reengagement process involves outreach, reenrollment, and interventions to support reengagement and educational persistence of out-of-school youth.



### How Persistence, Recovery, and Reengagement Support Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement

- Comprehensive transition programs that support students in their transition from middle school into high school lead to significantly lower course failure and dropout rates (Balfanz, 2009; Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Bruce et al., 2011).
- Students who are highly mobile and frequently transition among schools are more likely to fall behind academically, and have higher dropout rates during their periods of transition from school to school (Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Schwartz et al., 2017).
- Connecting out-of-school youth to quality educational pathways leads to high school completion, future employment, growth, and success on the individual and community levels (Hossain, 2015; Piparinen, 2006; Carter & House, 2010).
- Adult mentors combined with relevant learning through pathways leads to student engagement in learning, positive relationships with peers and adults, and improved course pass rates (Chan et al., 2020; Jenner et al., 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Learn more about the research behind this strategy in the *Persistence, Recovery, and Reengagement Research Synthesis*.



## Implementation Considerations

The following considerations are provided to inform district and school planning and implementation of the Persistence, Recovery, and Reengagement strategy.

**Strengthen Foundational Practices.** The five foundational practices in the Colorado Dropout Prevention Framework guides districts and schools in building systems and practices that directly support this strategy. Review the *Dropout Prevention Foundational Practices and Strategies Crosswalk* for more information.

**Provide Transition Programs.** Districts and schools can develop proactive programming to support student persistence through key points when students disengage along the path to graduation. Comprehensive transition programming includes, but is not limited to, providing social-emotional and academic support for students during three significant periods of transition:

- **Students Progressing to New Grade Levels.** Supports to assist students and their families with successfully negotiating their transition into middle or high school are multifaceted and can include outreach activities, academic guidance, mentoring, advisory or orientation programming, and postsecondary and workplace readiness programming. Accelerated middle school programs (e.g., self-contained academic programs to help struggling middle school students) have been found to keep students in middle school and positively transition to high school. CDE’s [School Counselors and College Transition Specialists guide](#) and [Workforce Transition Specialists & Employment Counselors guide](#) provide tools and resources to support the development of transition programs.
- **Students Moving Between Schools.** Highly mobile students—such as homeless youth, migrant students, and youth in foster care—are often most at risk during school-to-school transition periods and may also experience multiple transitions during their Grades K–12 journey. CDE’s [Homeless Education Resources](#), [Foster Care Education Resources](#), and [Migrant Education Program](#) provide tools and resources to help districts and schools develop programs to support highly mobile students during and outside of transitions.
- **Students Accessing Special Education Services.** Transition programs for students who receive special education services help prepare them to gain access to the supports and services necessary to become as independent as possible after high school graduation. CDE’s [Transition Toolkit for special needs students](#) provides tools and resources to support districts and schools in planning effective transition programs to help students successfully move from school to postsecondary education and training, independent living, and employment based on the student’s abilities, needs, and goals.

**Offer Accessible and Flexible Credit Recovery Programs.** Districts and schools may have a lot of flexibility and control over the type of content and credit recovery options they provide. Different programs or strategies may allow students to demonstrate learning or make up portions of a course in the same school year. And long-term approaches may allow students to work on their credit recovery classes in an assigned time period, over the summer, on school breaks, after school, on weekends, at home on their own, at night in school computer labs, or online. CDE’s [Mathematics Pathways, Accelerating Learning, and Credit Recovery](#) provides specific guidance and supports for the development of mathematics-focused credit recovery programs. Although most credit recovery programs tend to focus on math and

### Implementation Considerations

- Strengthen Foundational Practices
- Provide Transition Programs
- Offer Accessible and Flexible Credit Recovery Programs
- Develop Student Reengagement Programs

### Implementation Tools and Resources

- [Structuring Out-Of-School Time to Improve Academic Achievement: A Practice Guide](#)
- [Middle School Transition Planning Practices](#)
- [A Blueprint for Scaling Tutoring Across Public Schools](#)
- [Bringing Students Back to the Center: A Resource Guide for Implementing and Enhancing Re-Engagement Centers for Out-of-School Youth](#)
- [Issue Brief: Credit Recovery](#)



English language arts, districts and schools may want to explore whether students may need additional credit recovery options that are more inclusive of other content areas.

**Develop Student Reengagement Programs.** Out-of-school youth, like all youth, need positive relationships with caring adults, the opportunity to engage in learning experiences with real-world connections, and support and resources to help them figure out life outside of school. Reengaged youth also have unique challenges as they reenter high school that may be related to the learning they missed when out of school or what they were doing outside of school. To develop a reengagement program for out-of-school youth, districts and schools should:

- **Identify Disengaged Students.**
  - Keep an updated list of students who have been coded as dropouts and contact them through outreach programs.
  - Collect and examine student data on at least an annual basis to understand which students are disengaged, why they have left school (e.g., academic and nonacademic reasons such as pregnancy, health problems, incarceration, childcare/family care), and what unique challenges they may have as they reenter high school (e.g., gaps in knowledge or few course credits).
- **Identify Available Resources.**
  - Map the community's available resources for youth services that may support a student as they reengage in school and compare them with the demand for reengagement services.
  - Explore Colorado resources that can be used to support reengagement including:
    - [Rural Coaction grant](#)
    - [Expelled and At-Risk Student Services grant](#)
    - [Student Re-engagement Grant Program](#)
    - [Empowering Action for School Improvement grant](#)
- **Identify and/or Develop Alternative Educational Options.** Youth who leave high school need easier on-ramps back into school. Older youth may be uncomfortable reenrolling in a traditional high school alongside 14- and 15-year-old students. Returning students also might not be comfortable coming back to the school they left. To reengage out-of-school youth, districts and schools can offer a range of alternative education options for students (e.g., self-paced credit recovery, flexible school schedules, competency-based education, internships). These options can be designed as programs in a school or as a stand-alone school (e.g., [Alternative Education Campus Accountability](#)) depending on the need.
- **Connect with Youth Through Outreach, Assessment, and Referrals.** Out-of-school youth are often unaware of or unable to access existing support services. Often, outreach to this population of youth requires multiple strategies and an advocate to reengage them in education, help them access needed services, and find connections at the school. Look for multiple opportunities to also engage and communicate with parents/guardians—such as using school-based apps, phone calls, and reaching out through the community—to better understand and connect with the needs of out-of-school youth.

## Equitable Implementation of Persistence, Recovery and Reengagement

There are many paths a student can take to graduation. Ensure that options for recovering lost opportunities and reengaging in school are effective for the students with the greatest need and consider how to equitably reach those students.

To support equitable implementation of the Persistence, Recovery, and Reengagement strategy, districts and schools can consider the strategy through the lens of equity in access, representation, and quality.

### Equity in Access. What processes or practices need to be in place to ensure students persist and have access to recovery and reengagement programs?

- Ensure broad understanding of available transition programs, including how they support different student groups (e.g., highly mobile students, students in foster care).
- Identify and remove barriers to access (e.g., ensure communication efforts are linguistically diverse, remove onerous steps in reenrollment processes).
- Develop specific recovery programs and ensure they are accessible through a school's early warning system for schools Grades K–12.
- Incorporate systematic approaches to building meaningful relationships and connections between adults and students (e.g., advisory classes, interest-based clubs).
- Examine policies to ensure that previous performance does not limit future access (where possible).

### Equity in Representation. What processes or practices need to be put in place to ensure student representation in persistence, recovery, and reengagement programs reflect the demographics of the overall student population?

- Collect and examine data on student participation and student experience in programs.
- Incorporate culturally responsive practices into persistence, recovery, and reengagement programs.

### Equity in Quality. What processes or practices need to be put in place to ensure students are provided high-quality experiences in persistence, recovery, and reengagement programs?

- Develop clear standards and expectations for recovery and reengagement programs.
- Ensure recovery and reengagement programs include site-based teams with outlined specific roles and responsibilities of school staff.

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