PERSISTENCE, RECOVERY, AND REENGAGEMENT

Colorado Dropout Prevention Framework

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

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Implementation Considerations

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

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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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