



Persistence, Recovery, and Re-engagement DROPOUT PREVENTION FRAMEWORK RESEARCH SYNTHESIS

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.

The use of persistence, recovery, and reengagement supports dropout prevention and student engagement efforts in a number of ways:

- 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 (Jenner et al., 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2017; Chan et al., 2020).

Colorado Dropout Prevention Framework

The Colorado Dropout Prevention Framework was updated in 2023 to include five foundational practices and four strategies that support school and district efforts to decrease dropout rates and increase student engagement in learning, credit attainment, postsecondary preparation, and graduation rates.

Foundational Practices

- Connected Relationships and Culture
- Strong Family and Community Relationships
- Relevant and Engaging Learning Opportunities
- Data-Based Decision Making
- Aligned Policies and Practices to Build Coherence

Strategies

- On-Track/Early Warning Systems
- Multiple Pathways to Graduation
- Counseling the Whole Child
- Persistence, Recovery, and Reengagement

Research Overview

Several bodies of research inform the empirical understandings of persistence, recovery, and re-engagement. Drawing from studies of students' experiences, their interpersonal relationships, and schooling programs, the research synthesis indicates that there is a complex set of circumstances and factors—both in students' personal lives and at school—that influence their abilities to persist, recover credit, and re-engage with academics.

Early studies (2013-2014) examined aspects of students' lived experiences, from friendships to family dynamics to home life, to understand their schooling outcomes. One such study (Johnson et al., 2014) examined students' peer relationships as an intervention. The study found that students' relationships with peers could be leveraged effectively to provide school-based, social-emotional learning interventions. Moreover, Johnson et al. also argue that intervening in 9th grade can increase the possibility that students graduated on time by 12th grade. An effort to determine what methods are effective for increasing the likelihood of on-time graduation was also a focus of an evaluation study by Zhao (2013) which considered the effectiveness of an online re-engagement program. Those who completed the program had a 67% graduation rate and survey responses by both teachers and students indicated that they viewed the program positively. However, the course completion rate was 37%, which was viewed as a problem. The survey responses also indicated a need for support, as teachers asked how to better support students in completing the program and students indicated they wanted more support as they worked to complete the program.

The over the next few years, the research field provided more guidance on how to establish such programs (US DoE resource guide, 2014) and further defined terms related to persistence, recovery, and re-engagement (Dary et al., 2016). For instance, one such study argued that dropping out need not be perceived as permanent, but rather such students still have the capacity to re-engage, recover, and graduate with supports (Barrat & Berliner, 2016). Online and virtual programs not only expanded the reach of such programs and the likelihood of graduating (Heinrich, 2021; Hart et al., 2019) but also which students might benefit from them. One study found that such virtual programs have a "relatively high rate of participation of economically disadvantaged, special education, and Black students" who were then on-track to earn a high school diploma on-time with their peers (Bentley, 2019). Career and technical education programs have also been found to be perceived as relevant and help students stay engaged (Dougherty, 2021; US DoE, 2019; NCES, 2013).

More recently (2020 onward), studies have found such flexible programs, like online or virtual credit recovery programs offered outside of school hours, over the summer or during other breaks in the school calendar, have broad benefit. A study by Thomas et al. (2020) suggested that such programs "increased students' cognitive engagement" which they were able to maintain when they returned to "mainstream schooling." The social-emotional connections to peers and teachers were identified as beneficial in earlier studies, a trend that continued in Lewis (2021), which found that students who do re-engage with their high schools and coursework have "strong perceptions of family" and other adults in their lives. Indeed, several studies over the last few years have found that social and familial connections to peers, teachers, and relatives have a positive impact on increasing the likelihood that students will persist with their schooling and graduate from high school (Balfanz, 2023; Chen et al., 2018; Hynes, 2015).

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