

DROPOUT PREVENTION

A Briefing Prepared by the Washington Workforce Association
for members of
Workforce Development Councils and Youth Councils

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DROPOUT PREVENTION PROGRAMS IN GENERAL

OSPI Policy

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) divides dropout prevention efforts into two categories:

- school restructuring, and
- targeted programs for the prevention and recovery of dropouts.

Restructuring as a dropout prevention strategy takes into account researchers' difficulties in identifying reliable, actionable factors by which students at risk of dropping out can be identified, and therefore takes the approach of working to make schools better for *all* students in three ways:

- comprehensive school improvement,
- increasing students' sense of belonging in schools, and
- increasing student engagement through meaningful curriculum and effective instruction.

This is a large area of study, and educators recognize the inter-relatedness of dropout prevention and all other efforts to improve schools' effectiveness.

Targeted programs being explored by OSPI include:

- early intervention (in early grade school planning—also includes preschool and even birth-to-three intervention programs);
- supplemental programs, such as added support, student assistance, “assistance learning” (meaningful service projects), and mentoring;
- out-of-school enhancement programs;
- alternative in-school programs (variously known as “schools-within-a-school”, “pull-out” programs);
- alternative schools, including “schools of choice” and “cyber schools”; and
- continuation schools, including “middle colleges”, adult high schools (on community college campuses), Job Corps, GED preparation programs.

Published research reports generally agree with OSPI's December 2003 report on dropout prevention: that there is a lack of experimental research on this subject, and that research findings are correlative at best. Also, while examples of real benefits of various targeted programs and school restructuring efforts are not hard to show, no major research has been undertaken to compare the benefits of one program or approach with another.

Substitute House Bill 1708, although partially vetoed by Governor Gregoire to avoid an unfunded mandate, requires OSPI to report to the Legislature by December 1, 2005 on a review and evaluation of:

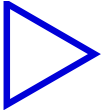
- 1.) the most promising comprehensive dropout prevention programs and practices that encompass school-wide or district-wide restructuring of the delivery of educational services;
- 2.) the most promising targeted dropout prevention programs and practices designed to provide social and other services in coordination with educational services to students who are at risk of dropping out due to the presence of family, personal, economic, or cultural circumstances; and
- 3.) policy and other changes to enhance the ability of career and technical education and skills center programs to further contribute to dropout prevention efforts.

National Programs

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is conducting a multi-faceted funding campaign to increase on-time high school graduation rates, with a special emphasis on college-readiness and access to postsecondary education for disadvantaged students.

Upward Bound, a Department of Education TRIO program, funded at about \$265 million in recent years, focuses on preparing disadvantaged high school students for success in postsecondary programs. According to the US Department of Education's 1993 report, evaluations conclude that Upward Bound is successful in getting students to graduate from high school. The program is threatened with discontinuation in the Administration's budget proposal.

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program was recognized by the Secretary of Education in 1992 as a model dropout prevention program. It pairs secondary school students in a mentoring relationship with at-risk limited-English-proficient middle school students. Not only are results good for the middle-school mentees, but the high-school mentors' graduation rates are dramatically improved, presumably by building a sense of community, relevancy, and self-worth among the high school participants.



CURRENT WASHINGTON STATE EFFORTS

WTECB's 10% Dropout Prevention and Intervention Program

The Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB) moved PY 2004 10% funding out to the 12 WDCs in the amount of \$1,340,000. \$1.2 million was evenly divided among the WDCs, and the remainder was allocated by the WIA Youth formula. While services to be funded directly are limited to WIA-Youth-eligible participants, a key feature of the application guidelines is leveraging Basic Education Act (BEA) funds, which, by agreements with school districts or Educational Services Districts (ESDs), can be used to provide the same types of services to non-WIA-Youth-eligible students who are identified as at risk of dropping out.

Predictably, the WDCs favor allocation/dividing of statewide funds over competition, and feedback about this particular program supports that stance. Additional comments about this funding mechanism were:

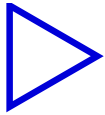
- the application process, while better than competition because partners could be assured that funding would follow their efforts, was about as arduous as a competitive grant;
- allowing a WDC to opt out would have been well-received; and
- stronger, clearer direction from OSPI to school district superintendents about tracking BEA funds, and about cooperative agreements for those funds' use, would have been enormously helpful in some cases.

\$670,000 of PY 2005 statewide 10% funds are anticipated to be moved out to WDCs for continuing these dropout prevention activities. Application guidelines will be released after May 12.

In-Demand Scholars Program

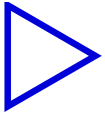
WWA is currently the grant recipient for a Department of Labor Earmark, and is contracting with 6 Workforce Development Councils for the creation and implementation of locally-designed scholarship programs. In collaboration with industry partners, programs are designed to attract high school students to the idea of entering postsecondary training to prepare for locally-identified occupations that pay at least \$25,000 a year.

Although none of the In-Demand Scholars programs target student populations identified as at risk of dropping out, all six of WWA's In-Demand Scholars programs address the dropout problem by directly assisting a limited number of students to undertake postsecondary training. The programs' equally important objective (but less quantifiable in terms of outcomes) is to promote awareness among other high school students of living-wage occupations in their local areas, and the need to complete high school in order to access those occupations. This objective of increasing the perceived relevancy of curriculum and its connection to the world of work is well supported in the research literature as an effective dropout prevention strategy for school-restructuring efforts and for targeted programs.



TRUANCY LAWS AND PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Becca Law has, since 1995, been one of Washington State's more direct efforts to address truancy problems, which are a contributing factor to the high dropout rate. This is an update of existing truancy laws, and puts some new and very specific "teeth" into mandatory school attendance. Certain steps are required of school districts at progressive stages of a student's attendance problem: from conferences with parents after a set number of unexcused absences, court petitions, all the way to sanctions against parents, including fines of not more than \$25/day of unexcused absence. Most of the research literature on dropout prevention finds that increasing punitive measures against students is counter-productive. However, the Becca Law is a significant source of court referrals to Education Centers (programs run by nonprofits that prepare youth for reentry into high school or GED completion.)

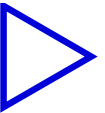


PARKING LOT

The **No Child Left Behind** Act (NCLB) is the main policy framework under which dropout prevention programs are currently conceived and implemented in most states, including Washington. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is a set of standards each state must develop against which program outcomes are evaluated under the requirements of NCLB.

▷ Utah has passed legislation in early May of 2005 that allows school districts the option of applying the state's existing performance accountability standards instead of the NCLB standards.

▷ The National Education Association and 9 school districts around the nation have brought a lawsuit against the Department of Education, alleging that the NCLB clearly promises that states will be required to comply only with provisions of NCLB that are funded, naming Education Secretary Margaret Spellings as defendant, because she is the chief enforcer of the law. There are no Washington State school districts involved in the lawsuit.



MORE INFORMATION

For more information about WWA's interest in this topic, contact:

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For more information about dropout prevention research, and dropout prevention efforts in Washington State, see the source documents that accompany this briefing, and visit the websites of the documents' authoring organizations.