

# Effective Dropout Prevention Strategies: What Does Research Tell Us?

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Reducing Dropout and Increasing Educational Attainment

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## How Common Is Dropping Out?

- 1 in 10 young adults is a dropout
- Minority students more likely to drop out – particularly Latinos
- Dropout rates fell in 1970s and 1980s – have since remained flat



## What Are the Consequences?

- Poor labor market prospects:
  - More likely to be unemployed
  - Lower wages (and gap is growing)
- More criminal involvement, public assistance receipt
- Makes high dropout rates a pressing policy concern



## Why Do Youth Drop Out?

- Many factors contribute
- Gradual process of disengagement
- Commonly cited reasons:
  - High school overwhelming, impersonal
  - Poor early academic preparation
  - School boring or irrelevant
  - Lack of home support



## What Is Known About Effective Prevention Strategies?

- These results draw on findings from the What Works Clearinghouse:
  - Systematic assessment of research on the effectiveness of education interventions
  - Dropout prevention one of several review areas
- Supplemented with additional information

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## WWC Dropout Reviews

- Ongoing effort: Reviews of more than 20 interventions completed or under way
- Assessed 70+ studies so far—less than a third met WWC standards:
  - Weak research designs
  - Do not examine relevant outcomes (staying in, progressing in, and completing school)

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## Four Basic Approaches Have Been Tested

- Adding services to the standard curriculum
- Whole-school reform
- Alternative schools
- Second-chance approaches—intervening after dropout

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## Close Monitoring and Quick Response Shows Promise

- Two similar interventions – Check & Connect and ALAS – have positive evidence
- Of all programs reviewed, these show strongest effects on staying and progressing in school
- Key feature: Close monitoring of attendance, behavior, and school performance
  - Quick intervention when problems arise
  - Begins in middle and early high school
- Includes mentoring, case management, and family outreach

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## Not All Supplemental Strategies Are Effective

- Example: Quantum Opportunity Program (QOP)
- Intensive, expensive—but no impacts
- Shares common elements with Check & Connect and ALAS (case management and mentoring)
- But differs in important ways:
  - No attendance or performance monitoring
  - No family outreach
  - Less narrowly targeted
- Differences point to elements of Check & Connect and ALAS that may have contributed to success

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## Whole-School Reform: Some Evidence of Success

- One model—Talent Development—had positive effects on progressing in school:
  - Many other approaches not tested
- Reform model for large schools with attendance, discipline, and dropout problems
- Key elements:
  - Small learning communities
  - Curriculum reforms (“double dose” English and math classes, college-prep for all)

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## Alternative High Schools: Little Evidence of Positive Effects

- Alternative high schools vary—but share common elements:
  - Smaller schools and classes
  - Emphasis on experiential learning
  - Additional support services
- Not shown to reduce dropout or increase graduation
- Alternative middle schools show more promise:
  - Chance for those behind-grade-level to “catch up”
  - Reduce dropout—but unclear students learn more

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## Second-Chance Approaches Can Promote GED Receipt

- Common elements of enhanced GED programs:
  - Basic education, GED preparation
  - Occupational skills training, other supports
- Consistently shown to increase high school completion:
  - Through greater GED attainment
  - In some cases, reduces diploma receipt somewhat
- More limited evidence of success improving college going and employment

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## Choosing an Approach: Consider Your Goals

- Transforming a struggling school or supporting high-risk students?
- Preventing dropout or re-engaging those who have already dropped out?

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## Also Consider Costs

- Per-student costs vary substantially:
  - Check & Connect: ~\$6,000
  - Talent Development: ~\$1,500
  - Enhanced GED: ~\$9,000
- So do costs per dropout prevented:
  - Check & Connect: ~\$30,000
  - Talent Development: ~\$20,000
  - Enhanced GED: ~\$75,000
- Early intervention may be more cost-effective

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## To Sum Up

- Supplemental approaches:
  - Close monitoring/rapid intervention shows promise
- Whole-school reform:
  - Evidence of effects—but research is limited
- Alternative high schools:
  - Generally found not effective
- Second-chance approaches:
  - Enhanced GED programs can increase GED attainment—but at relatively high cost

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## To Learn More

- Visit the What Works Clearinghouse website: [www.whatworks.ed.gov](http://www.whatworks.ed.gov)

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