

Dropout Prevention [An Institute of Education Sciences](#) Practice Guideⁱ

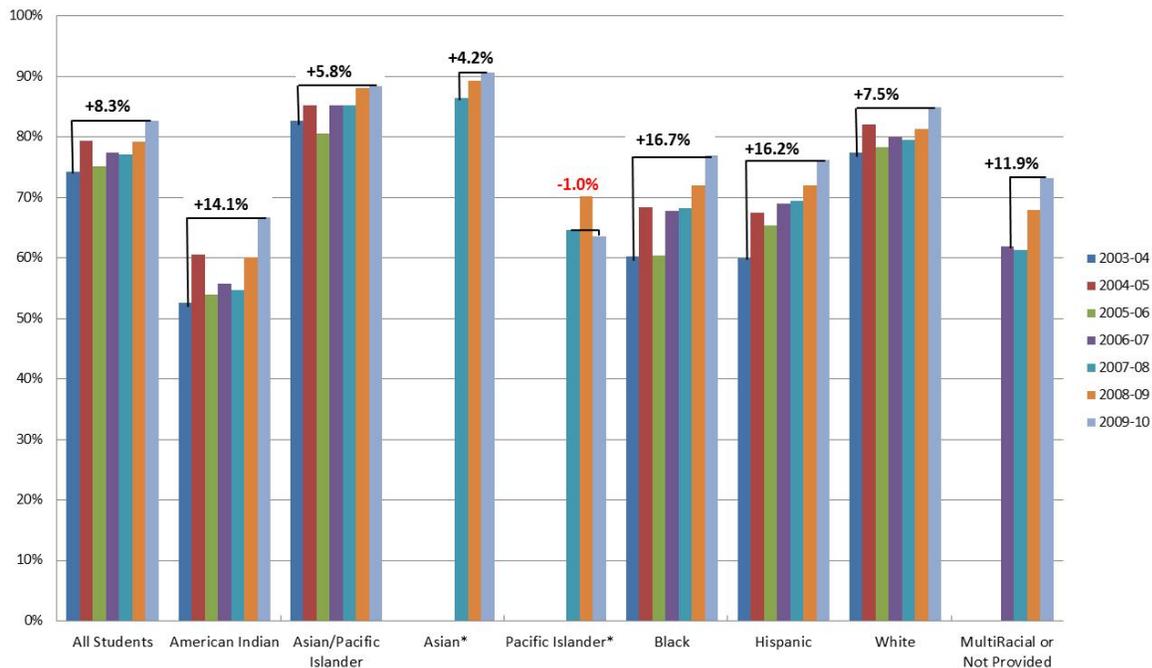
Purpose of the Guide

To identify specific strategies for schools, districts, and policymakers to reduce dropout rates. Informed by research from the past 20 years, a panel of nationally recognized experts reported evidence-based strategies to prevent students from dropping out.

Washington Context

In school year 2009-2010, more than 14,000 Washington students dropped out of high school. These students were disproportionately students of color and students of poverty. However, some encouraging trends are emerging. Although the opportunity/achievement gaps are still significant, nearly all racial/ethnic student subgroups have extended graduation rates that are higher than the each of the previous six years. Only Pacific Islander students have not shown increases.ⁱⁱ

Statewide Extended Graduation Rates, 2004-2010
Largest Increases Among Black, Hispanic, American Indian Students



Data Challenges

States have historically calculated their dropout and graduation data in various ways. Thus it has been difficult to reliably compare states to each other. Beginning with the 2010-11 school year, the US Department of Education is requiring states to calculate and report data consistently for the purposes of federal accountability. This will allow better comparisons among states. Despite these challenges, EdWeek annually creates a report comparing states' graduation statistics which lags behind the local Washington report; their most recent report captured data from 2008. The statistics discussed here are from two years later (the 2009-2010 school year).

IES Panel Recommendations

Use Diagnostic Processes to Reducing Dropout Rates

- 1) Utilize data systems that support a realistic diagnosis of the number of students who drop out and that help identify individual students at high risk of dropping out.
 - Use data to identify students with histories of academic problems, truancy, behavior problems, and retention
 - Monitor all students' academic performance and sense of engagement continually
 - Document information on student withdrawals

Target Intervention for Middle and High School Students at Risk

- 2) Assign adult advocates to students at risk of dropping out.
- 3) Provide academic support and enrichment to improve academic performance.
 - Provide support in reading, writing, and math as well as test-taking skills, study skills
 - Provide extra study time and opportunities to recover credit
- 4) Implement programs to improve students' classroom behavior and social skills.
 - Establish partnerships with community-based providers such as social services, mental health, and law enforcement

Implement Schoolwide Intervention to Enhance Engagement and Prevent Dropouts

- 5) Personalize the learning environment and instructional process.
 - Create smaller classes, extended time in classrooms, small learning communities, and encourage extracurricular activities
- 6) Provide rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning and provide the skills needed to graduate and to serve them after they leave school.
 - Professional development for teachers
 - Career academies and multiple pathways
 - Opportunities for work-related experiences
 - Provide students with information about college

Researchers agree that student absences, grade retention, and low academic achievement are indicators for dropping out and research shows that critical transition points such as the move from middle school to high school are difficult for already struggling students. Low socio-economic status and behavioral problems are also known risk factors for dropping out.ⁱⁱⁱ

Panel Conclusions

- Implementing multiple recommendations will be necessary to make the most difference
- Districts and schools must implement data systems to identify individual students at high risk
- Constant monitoring of data and adjustment of approaches is needed
- Student engagement is critical; disengagement can start in elementary school

Source: Tierney, W.G., Bailey, T., Constantine, J., Finkelstein, N., & Hurd, N.F. (2009). Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do: A Practice Guide (NCEE #2009-4066). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/practicesguides>.

ⁱ This guide is part of a series of Practice Guides developed by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), a division of the US Department of Education, to address critical issues in education. A panel of nationally-recognized individuals with expertise in research and the specific topic of a given Practice Guide are enlisted to conduct a rigorous review of existing research. These experts established a series of recommended strategies which are assigned a strong, moderate, or low rating of evidence based on the degree of replicability and generalizability of the studies upon which they are based.

ⁱⁱ Information compiled from seven most recent reports on graduation and dropout statistics in Washington State, retrieved from <http://www.k12.wa.us/DataAdmin/default.aspx>.

ⁱⁱⁱ IES Practice Guide, page 13