

Ensure Quality Data is Available and Used



Supporting Research

What is the research evidence supporting this recommendation?

Dropping out of high school is a process, not a one-day event. Research shows that early warning indicators of potential dropouts include school absences, behavior problems and failure in the core subjects of English and Math. Students can be identified as at risk of not completing high school as early as grade 6 using these indicators. Minnesota has an early response system, The Minnesota Early Indicator and Response System (MEIRS) that combines multiple data points and provides screening information to examine which students are on or off track for high school graduation and offers a framework on how to support them. Every school must have a team responsible for using this system, or another data system, to track indicators of disengagement on a regular basis and provide interventions to meet the unique needs and preferences of students, families and communities to ensure student success.

What is an early indicator and response system?

An important part of keeping students on track for graduation and postsecondary success is to identify and address problems before they grow into major obstacles. Research suggests that students who eventually drop out of high school exhibit strong predictive indicators of dropping out, such as attendance issues, behavior infractions, and course failure. These indicators may be used to predict high school graduation as early as the start of middle school (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Moore, & Fox, 2010). Early indicator and response systems may be used to identify individual students at risk of dropping out and to identify common risk factors in particular schools (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). Using the information from these systems, educators can provide students at risk of dropping out with the extra supports they need to succeed in school.

The power of an early indicator and response system

Prior research shows that preventing students from exhibiting one or more of these early warning indicators can boost the odds of graduation from approximately 25% to 75%, which can dramatically improve a young person's life trajectory (City Year, 2016). Informed by research about the academic and behavioral predictors of dropping out (Allensworth & Easton, 2005, 2007), early warning systems are a promising approach to effective dropout prevention (Dynarski et al., 2008). A good example is Diplomas Now, which is an innovative, multi-year approach to whole-school improvement for the nation's most challenged middle and high schools. Diplomas Now uses an early warning system to identify students who are off. The key metric it was designed to improve is to reduce early warning indicators including attendance, behavior, and course performance in English and math. Supported by a \$30 million validation grant from the U. S. Department of Education, one of the largest randomized controls studies of its kind was conducted to evaluate the Diplomas Now model. They find strong evidence that across multiple school districts it is not only possible to identify sixth and ninth grade students who are on the path to dropping out, but also to change their course and get them back on track to high school graduation (MDRC, 2016).

An early warning system uses readily available data to systematically identify students who are at risk; identified students then can be matched with appropriate interventions to help them get on track for graduation (Heppen & Therriault, 2008; Jerald, 2006; Kennelly & Monrad, 2007; Neild, Balfanz, & Herzog, 2007). In addition, early indicator and response systems limit the costs of dropout prevention by enabling schools and districts to target assistance to students likely to drop out (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009).

The Minnesota Early Indicator and Response System (MEIRS)

Providing supports to our students who are showing signs of disengaging from school is critical to increasing Minnesota's graduation rates. The Minnesota Department of Education has developed a screening tool to assist educators in tracking and supporting student progress toward graduation from high school in four years. The Minnesota Early Indicator and Response System (MEIRS) is a tool that can be used to provide a snapshot of students in grade 6 and grade 9 who are at increased risk of not completing high school in four years. Using validated research-based variables associated with dropping out of school (such as attendance, multiple enrollments, state accountability test scores and suspension/expulsion) supports can be developed and targeted to students who may need additional assistance to stay on track for graduation. The purpose of an early indicator and response system is to:

- Screen for students who are at risk of not completing high school in four years.
- Facilitate student success by using the data to match appropriate supports to student needs. These supports may include systemic responses as well as individual interventions.

Once students are identified as being at risk of dropping out, teachers, counselors, and community partners can intervene with targeted dropout prevention strategies (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). It is important to remember that students who are identified as having one or more risk factor are not destined to drop out of school – and they may in fact graduate in four years without receiving additional supports. Some of the students may graduate in five or six years. However, the students with risk factors are at greater risk of not graduating from high school in four years and are likely to require some additional supports that are targeted to their needs in order to increase their chances of success.

The supports that students receive will vary by individual or for groups of students. Matching interventions and supports to student needs will require a team problem-solving process after initial review of the data. Staff will be required to dig deeper to ascertain the root cause that is linked to the overt indicator. In some situations, students may require one-on-one counseling to address their problems. Interventions also could be targeted at the group level. For more information, please refer to [Multi-tiered system of supports](#). It also should be noted that, when groups of students are struggling in the same area, it is also a clue to look at systemic barriers and weaknesses.

References

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