EGS Research & Consulting

DROPOUT RECOVERY RESOURCE GUIDE

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Acknowledgements

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I. Introduction

The Dropout Recovery Resource Guide was developed based on information and findings associated with the following activities whose goal was to identify effective dropout recovery programs, strategies and practices.

- Literature search and review on effective dropout recovery practices and strategies;
- Statewide survey of school district and charter school dropout recovery programs;
- Identification of districts and charter schools with promising practices in dropout recovery;
- In-depth interviews with districts and charter schools with promising practices;
- Interviews with and site visits to districts, charter schools and college programs with potentially promising dropout recovery practices;

I.1 Literature Review

EGS Research & Consulting conducted a comprehensive literature search and review during August through September 14, 2007. The literature search and review focused on reports and studies addressing three major areas: the dropout problem, dropout recovery strategies and programs, and specific recovery programs that appeared to have a significant positive impact on recovery of dropouts. Literature review findings were used to inform the design of the survey, development of promising practice criteria, identification of promising practices, and the dropout recovery resource guide.

The resulting literature review report identified characteristics and strategies of promising dropout recovery programs. Promising strategies were identified in the areas of administration; dropout identification, tracking and recruitment; program organization; staffing; curriculum and instruction; coaching and mentoring; career and post-secondary advancement; and social support services. In addition, the report examined dropout recovery techniques addressing specific at-risk populations such as pregnant teens, over-age and under-credited youth, incarcerated youth, youth in foster care, homeless youth, youth with substance abuse issues, and migrant youth. The report also addressed dropout recovery program funding, dropout recovery program evaluation, ineffective strategies, and implications of the literature review for best practice definition and identification and for the structure of the dropout recovery resource guide. The report included a bibliography and a summary of each document reviewed. The bibliography is included in Chapter XVIII. The literature review report – *Online Manual and Technical Assistance Services for School Reentry Programs; Literature Review Report* – is available on the Texas Education Agency (TEA) website at
h*ttp://www.tea.state.tx.us/ed_init/sec/dropprev/*

Scientific research on dropout recovery strategies is limited in a number of ways. Researchers must rely most often on self-reported data and anecdotal data gathered through case studies and surveys in identifying and describing successful programs because it is difficult to gain access to "hard" data, such as achievement data, dropout/graduation data, and other measures specific to recovered dropouts. As is often

the case in educational research, most studies are not able to include comparison groups. In spite of these limitations, the literature does point to strategies with the potential to be "promising practices" in a variety of areas.

Most of the research focuses on dropout prevention—not recovery. Efforts specific to dropout recovery are often difficult to extract from the description of an overall program. Resources addressing dropout recovery seldom have even a modest research base to back up claims of success. Typically, the research used to validate dropout recovery program outcomes is anecdotal, has faulty methodologies or data, or both. Even when quantitative data is used to validate program outcomes, it is typically not tied to specific strategies used. That is, it is usually not discernable from the data provided which specific strategies within a complete dropout prevention/recovery program may have been effective or ineffective. Longitudinal data on dropouts recovered by a specific program is seldom available. Few programs follow students in a systematic way after they have completed the program.

As a result of these limitations, the Guide uses the term **"promising practice"** rather than "best practice" or "effective practice."

I.2   Dropout Recovery Statewide Survey

The objective of the statewide survey of Texas school districts and charter schools was to determine whether districts and charter schools have dropout recovery programs and what dropout recovery strategies they use; the extent to which these programs and strategies are consistent with the promising program components and strategies identified through the literature review; and the impact of these programs and strategies on school completion/dropout rates. The survey also asked districts to identify program components and strategies they considered to be effective in locating students who dropped out, returning them to school, and having these students complete high school.

The dropout recovery online survey was conducted over a six-week period – October 1 through November 9, 2007. On September 18, 2007, TEA posted on the *TEA Correspondence* web page a letter to superintendents, informing them about the Dropout Recovery Resource Guide project and the upcoming survey and asking for their cooperation in completing an online questionnaire. The letter was also e-mailed to all superintendents. TEA posted a follow-up message to superintendents on its *TEA Correspondence* web page on October 1, 2007 with a link to the online survey and instructions for survey completion. This message was also e-mailed to all district and charter school superintendents.

The online survey involved four data collection phases, implemented one to two weeks apart: an initial e-mailing, a general reminder to all district and charter school superintendents, a targeted reminder to non-respondents, and a reminder to superintendents of large districts who did not respond by the November 4, 2007 deadline.

Responses were obtained from 736 districts and charter schools, or 63 percent of the 1,169 districts and charter schools with an 8th grade or higher. A comparison of the 736

districts and charter schools that responded to the survey to the 1,169 districts and charter schools with an 8th grade and above showed that the respondent group was similar overall to the total population of districts and charter schools in Texas with an 8th grade and higher.

Survey data were supplemented with PEIMS data on total enrollment, high school completion rates, annual and longitudinal dropout rates and student demographics for 2004-05, 2005-06, and 2006-07.

Of the 736 responding districts and charter schools, 299 (40.6 percent) reported having a dropout recovery program and 437 (59.4 percent) did not.

I.3 Identification of Districts and Charter Schools with Dropout Recovery Promising Practices

Of the 299 districts and charter schools with dropout recovery programs, 187 reported promising dropout recovery practices. While these practices were self-reported they were in line with promising practices identified through the literature review. These districts and charter schools were selected for further investigation through a three-tier methodology.

- Districts and charter schools showing a decrease in dropout rates between 2004-05 and 2006-07;
- Districts and charter schools with "0" dropout rates in 2004-05, 2005-06, and 2006-07;
- Districts and charter schools with a longitudinal dropout rate below the state average rate in 2006-07.

The guiding principal in selecting the districts and charter schools was to cast a wide net to find promising practices in districts and charter schools serving a wide array of students. Exploring dropout recovery promising practices in such districts and charter schools would increase the relevance and applicability of the dropout recovery resource guide to a wide range of districts and schools. Consequently, EGS Research & Consulting profiled the districts and charter schools falling within each of the three tiers with regard to their total enrollment and percentage representation of specific student subpopulations such as economically disadvantaged students, at-risk students, African-American students, Hispanic students, limited English proficient students, and migrant students.

A total of 39 districts and charter schools were selected for further exploration. Overall, the 39 districts and charter schools selected varied in size, percentage of different student population groups, and dropout recovery program components. These districts and charter schools included:

- All 26 districts and charter schools whose dropout rates decreased between 2004-05 and 2006-07 (Tier 1).

- A sample of 4 out of 13 districts and charter schools with "0" dropout rates over the 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07 period (Tier 2).
- A sample of 9 out of 43 districts with a longitudinal dropout rate below the state average rate in 2006-07 (Tier 3). The nine Tier 3 districts were selected based on the dropout recovery practices they identified. That is, priority was given to those districts and charter schools with dropout recovery promising practices that were not identified by the selected Tier 1 and Tier 2 districts and charter schools.

I.4   In-depth interviews with Districts and Charter Schools with Promising Practices

EGS Research & Consulting conducted detailed interviews with representatives of the districts and charter schools selected as having dropout recovery practices consistent with the promising practices identified through the literature review and meeting additional dropout rate and demographic criteria. The comprehensive guide used in the interviews addressed all dropout recovery program components. Interviews ranged in length from 60 to 120 minutes and typically consisted of multiple participants: both administrators and staff. The interview process took place between January 16 and April 2008. Interviews were completed with 20 Tier 1 districts, two Tier 2 districts, and eight Tier 3 districts and charter schools:

Tier 1
- Axtel ISD
- Bay Area Charter School
- Bosqueville ISD
- Coleman ISD
- Dawson ISD
- Deer Park ISD
- Hearne ISD
- Kerrville ISD
- Lake Worth ISD
- Manor ISD/Excel High School
- Mineola ISD
- Morton ISD
- One Stop Multiservice Charter
- Presidio ISD
- Royse City ISD
- Sanford-Fritch ISD
- Sherman ISD
- Valley View ISD
- Willis ISD
- Yoakum ISD

Tier 2
- Boiling ISD
- Quitman ISD

Tier 3
- Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
- Katy ISD
- McKinney ISD
- North East ISD
- Socorro ISD
- Cross Plains ISD
- Frisco ISD
- Midway ISD

I.5 Interviews with and Site Visits to Districts, Charter Schools and Colleges with Potentially Promising Dropout Recovery Practices

EGS Research & Consulting conducted additional interviews in March and April 2008 with eight districts and charter schools identified through the statewide survey as having potentially promising dropout recovery practices. The practices these districts and charter schools follow did not meet all the promising practice criteria. The interviews targeted only those practices identified as potentially promising. The districts and charter schools interviewed included: Alief ISD, Galveston ISD, Grand Prairie ISD, Georgetown ISD, La Joya ISD, New Caney ISD, Paradigm Accelerated Charter, and Weslaco ISD.

The researchers also solicited recommendations from outside sources such as regional education service centers, Communities In Schools, and higher education institutions for districts, charter schools, and colleges with potentially promising dropout recovery programs. Based on these recommendations, EGS Research & Consulting conducted in-depth interviews with Bangs ISD and the North Heights Alternative High School in Amarillo ISD and visited two alternative high schools, a charter school and two early college programs in April and May 2008. The sites visited included: Gonzalo Garza Independent High School in Austin ISD, Windfern High School in Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, Raul Yzaguirre School for Success in Houston, Gateway to College in San Antonio College, and the Graduation Assistance Program in Howard College in Big Spring. During the site visits, the researchers interviewed, using an interview protocol, program administrators, teachers, professional staff and students and obtained documents describing each of the programs, and their organization, operations, services, students, and outcomes.

I.6 Use of Information from These Sources
The information obtained from these sources is incorporated throughout the Guide.

- Literature review results are presented in a Promising National or Other State Practices section under each dropout recovery program component.

- Information from the statewide survey is used to describe the State of Practice under each dropout recovery program component.
- Dropout recovery practices and strategies that specific districts, charter schools, alternative high schools and colleges use served as a basis for formulating the suggested Process and Promising Strategies sections of each dropout recovery program component.
- Information on practices and strategies that specific districts, charter schools, alternative academic high schools and colleges use as well as those identified in other states through the literature review are presented in the Supporting Examples section of each dropout recovery program component.

I.7   Guide Draft Review

The initial draft of the Guide was refined based on comments and suggestions TEA provided. The Guide was then reviewed by a TEA-selected group of 22 educational administrators and dropout prevention and recovery specialists representing school districts, charter schools, alternative high schools, regional education service centers, community colleges, and community organizations working with out of school youth. The Guide was also reviewed by 249 participants in two Dropout Recovery Promising Practices and Resources Forums convened on November 3 and November 5, 2008 at the Region XI Education Service Center in Fort Worth and the Region IV Education Service Center in Houston. Forum participants consisted of district, school, and charter school administrators and dropout prevention and recovery specialists; regional education service center consultants; community college administrators; and representatives of workforce and community organizations working with youth. Forum participants were divided into groups of five and six and reviewed Guide chapters.

Both the TEA-selected group of reviewers and the forum participants used a chapter review form, seeking feedback on each chapter section. EGS Research & Consulting recorded all comments, organized them by chapter and within chapter by review form question, and specified whether and how the respective comments will be addressed in the Guide. The Guide was further refined based on feedback and suggestions from these two groups of reviewers.

I.8   The Dropout Recovery Process

Dropout recovery is not a stand-alone program in most districts. If dropout recovery can be described as a continuum starting with the identification of students who dropped out and ending with high school completion/graduation of recovered dropouts, then only the upfront range of the continuum is distinctive and unique to dropout recovery. The upfront range of the continuum consists of the identification of students who dropped out, including leavers who did not enroll in a different district or school; the tracking of these students; and their recovery culminating with re-enrollment.

Once recovered, dropouts re-enroll and are typically placed in an alternative academic high school or, less commonly, in a credit recovery or TAKS remediation program in a regular high school, and they *become indistinguishable* from other at-risk students. Both recovered dropouts and students at-risk of dropping out enrolled in the alternative

program go through the same enrollment process, have individual graduation plans (IGPs) developed for them, receive support services respective of their needs, and are typically engaged in an individualized, self-paced, and computer-assisted education program. Alternative education programs do not differentiate between recovered dropouts and their other at-risk students, do not group recovered dropouts separately, do not assign special staff to them, and do not have a set of services specifically designed for recovered students.

The Guide offers information on both the distinct components of the dropout recovery process (i.e. identification, tracking and recovery) and the post recovery components that are provided to all at-risk students in alternative academic or credit recovery programs (i.e. re-enrollment, provision of education and support services, preparation for post-secondary education and employment). While recovered dropouts are indistinguishable in the post-recovery process from other at-risk students, the Guide advocates that districts recognize recovered dropouts as a distinct population. The Guide recommends that districts develop a database with information on their recovered dropouts and use this information for monitoring and follow-up; identify and address not only the academic needs of recovered dropouts but also their family, social, and economic needs thereby removing barriers that contributed to their dropping out; and that they closely and frequently monitor and follow-up recovered students. Indeed, emerging promising practices demonstrate greater differentiation in post recovery services between at risk students and recovered dropouts (See *Chapter XVI*).

II.   How To Use The Guide

II.1   Target Audience

The Guide is intended for districts and schools that want to develop and implement specific dropout recovery strategies or a comprehensive dropout recovery program; or want to expand, modify, or strengthen their current dropout recovery strategies, practices, or program.

Potential users of the Guide may include: superintendents, district administrators in charge of dropout reduction or special programs; middle and high school principals and assistant principals; principals of alternative academic high schools; district and school dropout reduction specialists; and counselors. College administrators with dropout recovery programs may also find this Guide of use.

II.2   Guide Structure

Chapters III through XV of the Guide address the different components of a comprehensive dropout recovery program. Dropout recovery program components the Guide addresses include:

- Dropout recovery program planning and administration;
- Dropout recovery program staffing;
- Collaborative partnerships;
- Identification and tracking of students who dropped out;
- Re-enrollment - Intake;
- Dropout recovery program options;
- Academic supports;
- Career and Technical Education supports;
- Social supports;
- Special populations;
- Post-secondary supports;
- Dropout recovery program funding; and
- Dropout recovery program evaluation.

Each of these components is presented as an independent module and can be used on its own. This structure allows users to access the component of the dropout recovery program that is of special interest to them without having to read all sections of the Guide to find the relevant information they seek.

The process steps and promising strategies sections presented for each of the program components have been formulated based on the promising dropout recovery strategies identified through the literature review and reinforced through the practices of Texas districts and schools.

For ease of use, the dropout recovery program modules adhere to a consistent structure. Each module has the following information:

- Objective of the dropout recovery component.
- Description of the current dropout recovery state of practice in Texas based on the results of the statewide survey.
- Summary of literature review results highlighting national or other state promising dropout recovery programs and strategies.
- Specification of district and school personnel and external organizations that may be involved in this component.
- A recommended process for developing and implementing the specific program component. The process has been articulated on the basis of findings of promising dropout recovery strategies and activities in the literature, the statewide survey, and interviews with and visits to districts and schools with promising dropout recovery practices. The process is described step-by-step in action-oriented, hands-on brief statements.
- Promising dropout recovery strategies discerned from practices in Texas, other states and nationally are presented in action-oriented, hands-on brief statements and referenced to actual districts, schools and college programs.
- The Supporting Examples section contains a list of promising dropout recovery strategies and practices implemented by districts, schools, and colleges in Texas and other states. Programs in other states listed as examples were identified through the literature review and have the associated citations. Texas school districts, schools and colleges listed as examples were identified through the statewide survey and through recommendations from other sources. Detailed information on these districts, schools and college programs was obtained through interviews and site visits. Each Texas-based example names the district, specifies its size (number of students), and identifies it as a Tier 1, a Tier 2, a Tier 3 or as a "Recommended District." A "Recommended District" is a district that has a potentially promising practice but did not meet all other screening criteria. The Guide classified districts with 10,000 or fewer students as "small," districts with 10,001 to 30,000 students as "medium," and districts with more than 30,000 students as "large." Examples referring to charter schools, name the school, identify its Tier or designate it as "Recommended School," and specify its number of students. Examples referring to a college program specify the name of the program and designate it as a "Recommended Practice."

  The size and tier information provided on each district puts the example in context, thereby helping the user of this Guide determine which of these examples is most pertinent to his/her district or school.

  - A Tier 1 district is a district that decreased its dropout rates between 2004-05 and 2006-07.
  - A Tier 2 district is a district with a "0" dropout rate in 2004-05, 2005-06, and 2006-07.
  - A Tier 3 district is a district that had a longitudinal dropout rate below the

state average rate in 2006-07.
- o A "Recommended District" is a district that was identified as having a promising dropout recovery strategy but has not met the three criteria relating to dropout rates.
- o A "Recommended" school is a charter school that was identified as having a promising dropout recovery strategy but has not met the three criteria relating to dropout rates.

II.3   Where to Start – Needs Analysis

Before you develop or implement a dropout recovery program (if you do not have a program at present), modify an existing program, or change current strategies to increase their effectiveness, it is important to take stock of your dropout recovery needs, your current program, or your current strategies.

The dropout recovery needs analysis, presented as a series of questions, is comprehensive, addressing dropout recovery infrastructure, educational and support services offered, funding and evaluation. The needs analysis mirrors the Guide sections addressing each dropout recovery program component. The comprehensiveness of the Guide reflects the underlying principal that for a dropout recovery program to be effective it needs to contain the components most appropriate to the profile and needs of the district's or school's dropout population. Implementing several strategies rather than a cohesive program may not yield the desired outcomes.

If your district or charter school does not have a dropout recovery program, the needs analysis questions will serve as a map guiding you toward what your dropout recovery program should include. Based on this program map, you can refer to the appropriate chapters and sections in the Guide to obtain detailed, step-by-step information on how to develop each component, what personnel should be involved, and what component-related strategies show promise.

If your district or charter school has a dropout recovery program, the needs analysis questions will provide you with a profile of your current dropout recovery program and identify gaps, areas in need of expansion or enhancement, and additional strategies that you can implement replacing current less effective strategies or expanding the range of strategies you use. You can then refer to the appropriate chapters and sections of the Guide to obtain detailed, step-by-step information on how to strengthen your program and how to address your program gaps or weaknesses.

The needs analysis consists of two categories of questions.

- Questions that require a "Yes" or "No/None" answer: A negative answer to any of these questions means that your district or school currently does not have this component, process, procedure or practice.

- Questions that offer several optional response categories: These questions list several response categories and identify the response category representing the most efficient/effective strategy. Identifying a category as the preferred strategy is based on experiential data from multiple districts and charter schools with promising dropout recovery practices. For example, districts are able to track more dropouts if they identify and track dropouts continuously throughout the year than if they implement a once-a-year identification, tracking and recovery effort.

Program Planning and Administration
- Do you have an office or department assigned to dropout recovery?
- Does the name of the office or department clearly represent its dropout recovery mission?
- Do you have a district or school administrator assigned to dropout recovery?
- Do you have district or school staff assigned to dropout recovery?
- Do you have a dropout recovery plan?
- Do your District and Campus Improvement Plans include dropout recovery goals and strategies?
- Are your administrators aware of/familiar with the dropout recovery program?
- Are your teachers and staff aware of/familiar with the dropout recovery program?
- Are students and their parents aware of/familiar with your dropout recovery program?
- Is your community aware of/familiar with the dropout recovery program?
- Is your dropout recovery program administered through the district office (centralized model) or is it the responsibility of each middle school and high school principal (distributed model)?

Program Staffing
- Do you consider your staff working with recovered dropouts to be highly qualified?
- Do staff members working with recovered dropouts believe that all students can achieve academic success?
- Do the job descriptions of the administrator(s) and staff assigned to dropout recovery explicitly state their dropout recovery responsibilities?
- Do staff members working with recovered dropouts have a "say" in programmatic decisions?
- Do you provide program-related professional development to your administrators and staff who are involved in your dropout recovery program?

Collaborative Partnerships

- Do you collaborate with other district education offices (homeless education, migrant education, etc.) to identify, recover, and provide services to recovered dropouts?
- Do you collaborate with local agencies (workforce councils, juvenile justice, foster care, health and human services, etc.) to identify, recover, and provide services to recovered dropouts?
- Do you collaborate with nonprofit organizations (local homeless shelters or battered women's shelters, local hospitals and clinics, local migrant worker organizations, local civic groups, adult basic education (GED) providers, etc.) to identify, recover, and provide services to recovered dropouts?
- Do you collaborate with local businesses to identify, recover, and provide services to recovered dropouts?
- Do you collaborate with local colleges or universities to identify, recover, and provide services to recovered dropouts, including GED services?

Identification and Tracking of Dropouts

- Do you identify students who dropped out:
    - On a continuous basis throughout the year?
    - Annually, at the end of the year?
    - Annually, during the summer before the start of a new school year
    - (*Note: Continuous identification is more effective.*)
- Do you know the reasons why students dropped out?
- Do you track students who dropped out:
    - On a continuous basis throughout the year?
    - Annually, at the end of the year?
    - Annually, during the summer before the start of a new school year?
    - (*Note: Continuous tracking is more effective.*)
- Do you have a formal process for tracking and recovering dropouts?
- Who is involved in tracking dropouts?
- What percentage of dropouts relative to the total number of dropouts do you actually track?
    - (*Note: A low percentage shows that tracking procedures are not effective.*)
- What percentage of dropouts that you track re-enroll in school?
    - (*Note: A low percentage shows that the recovery process is not effective.*)
- Do you have a district-wide dropout recovery database identifying students who dropped out, were tracked and re-enrolled?
- Do you generate reports on your recovered dropouts specifying services they receive, monitoring their academic progress and outcomes such as receiving a high school diploma, post-secondary employment and education?

Re-enrollment - Intake
- Do you individualize the services you offer/provide to dropouts:
  - Formally, e.g., through an individualized plan addressing academic and social supports?
  - Informally?
- Do you assign responsibility for tracking a recovered dropout's progress, both in terms of academic and social needs, to a single person—such as a case manager or a staff member who acts in the role of case manager?

Program Options
- Do you use data from multiple sources to determine why students in your district or school drop out?
- Do you consider academic and socio-cultural reasons for dropping out?
  - *(Note: Programs that identify and address both academic and social barriers are more successful in retaining recovered dropouts.)*
- Do you base the options you provide to students who have dropped out on the specific reasons why they dropped out?
- Where do you place recovered students:
  - In the high school from which they dropped out in a credit recovery lab or TAKS remediation program?
  - In an alternative academic high school?
  - In a virtual (online) program?
  - (*Note: Placing recovered dropouts in an alternative setting is more effective than in their former high school.*)

Academic Supports
- Do you hold your recovered students to high academic standards, and are these high standards/expectations articulated to all stakeholders (district and school staff, students, and parents)?
- Do you offer recovered dropouts:
  Individualized instructional programs?
  Accelerated credit recovery?
  - Online coursework?
  - Correspondence classes?
  - TAKS remediation/tutoring?
  - Flexible class schedules?
  - "Off-hour" classes (e.g., night school, weekend classes, summer school)?
- How frequently do you or your staff meet with students to review their academic progress toward graduation?

Career and Technical Education Supports

- What specific career and technical education supports do you offer recovered students:
    - Short- and long-term career planning?
    - Job acquisition/career readiness skill training?
    - Supervised work-study program?
    - Dual-credit opportunities with local technical schools?
- Do you collaborate with the local Workforce Council to provide additional support, such as:
    - GED preparation?
    - School-to-Work programs?
    - Other supports for working students?

Social Supports

- What specific social supports do you offer recovered students:
    - Life skills/character development training?
    - Specific counseling, such as individual counseling, group counseling or drug counseling?
    - Free/reduced-price meals?
    - Mentors?
    - Daycare/parenting classes?
    - Transportation or help with transportation (bus passes, etc.)?
    - Social services referrals/connections (e.g., Medicare/CHIP, food stamps, etc.)
    - Case management services?

Special Populations

- Does your dropout population include a significantly high concentration of one or more of the following special populations:
    - Pregnant Teens?
    - Over-Age, Under-Credited?
    - Migrant?
    - Incarcerated Youth?
    - Homeless Youth?
    - Youth in Foster Care?
    - Youth with Substance Abuse Issues?
    - Special Education Students?
    - Limited English Proficient/English Language Learners?
- Do you provide services to recovered dropouts from these populations that address their unique needs?

Post-Secondary Advancement Supports

- What specific post-secondary advancement supports do you offer recovered students:
    - o Interest inventories, aptitude measurement, Texas Success Initiative (TSI) instruments?
    - o Dual-credit or concurrent classes (academics or career and technical education)?
    - o Assistance in filling out college applications and financial aid forms?
    - o College orientation field trips?
    - o College and career fairs?
    - o Assistance with college entrance exams (preparation, transportation, paying fees)?

Dropout Recovery Funding and Costs

- Do you have a budget specifically allocated to dropout recovery?
- Do you consider your dropout recovery program adequately funded?
- If not, what can't you implement because of lack of funds?
- Do you have funding sources for the dropout recovery program that ensure the continuity and stability of the program?

Program Evaluation

- Do you use data and reports on recovered dropouts to evaluate your dropout recovery program?
- Do you formally evaluate your dropout recovery program?
- Do you prepare a dropout recovery program evaluation report with recommendations for program improvement?

III. Program Planning and Administration

III.1 School-Based or Centralized Program Planning and Management

Objective

To establish a dropout recovery program, give it a name that will clearly communicate its purpose, staff it appropriately, develop a data depository on dropouts, and manage the program effectively.

State of Practice

Dropout recovery has been until recently a marginal, and often hidden, function; one among many responsibilities that districts have to address. Recent legislation and district initiatives have focused on dropout prevention and not on dropout recovery. In fact, districts are not rewarded for recovering dropouts; they actually take a risk in bringing back students who have already dropped out once because such students are likely to drop out again; thereby increasing the district's dropout rate.

The statewide survey demonstrated that dropout recovery is regarded as a function, activity or strategy rather than as a fully developed program. It is largely hidden from sight because it is located in departments or offices with key responsibilities that are not related to dropout recovery. For example, some districts address dropout recovery through their dropout prevention offices, like Austin ISD, or through a Student Engagement office like Houston ISD. However, none of the districts and charter schools that responded to the survey reported having a dropout recovery office or department carrying the name "dropout recovery."

The statewide survey identified three dropout recovery administrative structures that districts use. The distributive, school-based structure is most common and gives the responsibility for dropout recovery to each secondary school or to the alternative high school. Nearly one-half of the districts (49.8 percent) with dropout recovery activities use this administrative format. The centralized management format puts the responsibility for dropout recovery with the central office: 43.8 percent of the districts with dropout recovery activities use this format. Few districts (five percent) have a community college manage their dropout recovery program.

Dropout recovery is housed in a wide range of offices and departments. Most commonly, the high school (47.5 percent) or the alternative education center (15.7 percent) oversees dropout recovery. In some of the districts, dropout recovery is overseen by the district central office (11.7 percent) or by district departments such as Curriculum and Instruction (5.3 percent), Student Services (3.3 percent) Administrative Services (1.3 percent), Federal Programs (1.3 percent) or the Dropout Prevention Program (1.3 percent).

There is also a wide variance in the type of administrators responsible for dropout recovery. The high school principal (33.1 percent) or the principal of the alternative high

school (3.7 percent), the assistant/deputy superintendent (7.7 percent) or the superintendent (3.0 percent), director of student services (5.7 percent), counselors (5.3 percent), and the district director/coordinator/facilitator (4.7 percent) are most commonly identified as being responsible for dropout recovery.

In more than three-quarters of the districts and charter schools with dropout recovery activities, the administrator responsible for dropout recovery is also responsible for dropout prevention.

None of the districts that participated in the survey have a dropout recovery plan. Very few districts incorporate dropout recovery activities in their district improvement plan or campus improvement plans.

While most districts were able to provide data on dropouts and recovered dropouts, they reported that getting such data requires special effort because the data are not housed in a central location and are not easily available. The absence of a central depository of data on dropouts and recovered dropouts points to a lack of use of such data on the part of school districts and to the invisibility of dropout recovery.

Who Is Involved

The administrators and staff involved will depend on the dropout recovery program administration structure the district chooses.

The centralized management format will involve the superintendent, a district-level dropout recovery program administrator, a district dropout recovery specialist, the director of counseling services, the PEIMS clerk, and a data analyst who will populate, maintain and analyze a data depository on students who dropped out and on recovered dropouts.

The school-based management format will involve the principal or assistant principal, counselors, parent or community liaisons, and a dropout prevention/dropout recovery specialist.

The community college administrating the dropout recovery program format will involve both participating districts' personnel – the superintendent or a central office administrator and principals – and community college personnel such as the community college president/administrator and the dropout recovery director.

Process

The following steps are recommended for the creation of school and district-wide visibility of dropout recovery through the establishment and operation of a dropout recovery program.

1. Establish a district-wide dropout recovery program and name the program "Dropout Recovery." Place the program on the district's organizational chart. These actions will increase awareness in the district of dropout recovery and give

visibility, clarity of purpose, and legitimacy to dropout recovery efforts.

2. Obtain principal and staff buy-in of the dropout recovery program.

3. Assign appropriate staff to the dropout recovery program, including an administrator, and define their responsibilities in the identification, tracking, recovery and monitoring of recovered students.

4. Prepare a district- and school-specific dropout recovery plan. Incorporate the dropout recovery plan in the District Improvement Plan and in respective Campus Improvement Plans.

   Review and update the dropout recovery plan annually, as part of the updating of the district and campus improvement plans. The dropout recovery plan is recommended to include:
   - A data report on the district's dropout rate, overall and by school;
   - Description of the dropout recovery program and its mission;
   - Articulation of strategies for identifying, tracking and recovering dropouts.
   - Articulation of strategies for monitoring recovered students up to their high school completion/graduation;
   - Identification of staff involved in dropout identification, tracking, recovery and monitoring;
   - Specification of data to be compiled on dropouts and recovered dropouts;
   - Description of annual evaluation of the district's dropout recovery program.

5. Design and implement a dropout and dropout recovery data depository. The depository will centralize all data on dropouts and recovered dropouts and include:
   - Name and contact information;
   - When student dropped out;
   - Grade level;
   - Academic credits;
   - Reason(s) for dropping out (including both academic and socioeconomic reasons);
   - How dropout was tracked: date, strategy (phone, home visit, etc.);
   - Whether dropout was recovered;
   - Date recovered student applied for re-admission;
   - Date student was re-admitted and where (to which school or program);
   - Student academic performance in alternative high school/credit recovery or other program;
   - Date student completed program/graduated;
   - If student dropped out or failed to complete program: reason(s) and date of dropping out;
   - Post-high school plans: work, college, etc.

6. Make periodic presentations to the school board about the dropout recovery program and its effectiveness in identifying, tracking and recovering dropouts and in getting them to complete high school.

7. Prepare quarterly and annual reports to the superintendent and the school board. It is suggested that:
    - The quarterly reports consist of district-wide and individual school data on the number of dropouts, the number tracked, the number recovered, the number who completed high school; number still enrolled, and the number who dropped out again.
    - The annual report also include a review and evaluation of program operations and strategies used to identify, track, recover and re-admit dropouts.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and schools reporting "promising practice" in this area, the following program planning and administration strategies have been particularly promising.

Strategy 1: Create a dropout recovery office that has responsibility district-wide for identifying, tracking and recovering students who dropped out; and coordinating, providing and monitoring academic and support services provided to recovered dropouts to facilitate their high school completion and preparation for college and employment. (Example A)

Strategy 2: Develop a district-wide dropout recovery database on identified, tracked and recovered dropouts; academic and support services provided to them, degree of preparedness for college and employment; high school graduation or GED; and post-secondary outcomes (college, employment). (Example B)

Supporting Examples

Example A: *Steinberg, Adria & Almeida, Cheryl. The Dropout Crisis: Promising Approaches in Prevention and Recovery. Jobs for the Future, June 2004.* http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/00000 19b/80/30/af/36.pdf

Chicago Public Schools created a Dropout Prevention and Recovery Department housed in the Office of High School Programs. The department established a Reenrollment Center linking dropouts and near dropouts to quality educational programs operated by the district or under contract to community organizations.

Portland Public Schools established a Department of Education Options. The department coordinates and monitors the district's alternative education schools as well as schools operated under contract with community organizations and a community college.

Example B: *Turning It Around: A Collective Effort to Understand and Resolve Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis.* Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN), 2006. http://www.projectuturn.net/downloads/pdf/Turning_it_around_Project_U-Turn.pdf

The University of Pennsylvania hosts the KIDS database to which multiple agencies submit data. This data is made available to advance research in the area of child welfare and well-being.

III.2 Program Location and Climate

Objective

To create a physical space and an inviting, comfortable and academically-motivating climate for recovered dropouts that builds a sense of belonging and motivates students to develop a positive attitude toward school and learning, to do well academically, and succeed.

State of Practice

Districts typically place recovered students in a special setting rather than mainstream them into their former high school. Districts that tried placing recovered students back in their former high school found this strategy ineffective. The special setting into which districts tend to place recovered students is typically an alternative high school or an alternative education center. Nearly 90 percent of the districts indicated that they have an alternative high school. The districts and charter schools with dropout recovery programs offer a range of alternative settings.

The alternative high school is usually separated from the regular high school: it can be in a totally separate location (42.8 percent), in a separate building on the campus of another school (10.0 percent), or on the same campus as the high school but in a different building (6.0 percent). About 23 percent of the survey respondents, mostly charter schools indicated that their alternative education program is within the regular high school.

About 84 percent of the responding districts and charter schools with dropout recovery programs reported that their program is located in a well maintained facility.

Promising National or Other State Practices

Location of the dropout recovery or alternative education program is an important factor in recovering students who have dropped out. A variety of factors may be at play when deciding where a program should be located. For example, programs housed within regular high schools sometimes become beneficial to the school as a whole. It may also make better economic sense to house the program at the regular school. Locating the program at another self-contained school facility creates a "small and cozy" feel, and for students who left school because of violence or bullying, this location provides a safe choice.

Programs may also be located at a non-school facility—a strategy particularly appealing to recovered dropouts because it removes the stigma of being a dropout. A non-school facility location can be more convenient to the students' everyday lives (e.g., located near work or home), and also enable students to break negative associations with schools (Stern 1986). One dropout recovery program located a digital/online campus in a shopping mall. The program became so popular with students looking to recoup lost credits that the district decided to open it to all students and add a second location (Hoyle & Collier 2006).

Many charter schools specifically focus on recovering out-of-school youth, and the development of a charter school has become a viable alternative for securing sustained funding for dropout recovery programs. (Martin & Halperin 2006). E-schools and correspondence courses have also gained popularity, allowing students to access program resources any-time, any-where (Chmelynski 2006).

School climate is an important ingredient in successful programs. Developing an effective school climate may include addressing safety issues, ensuring a clean and orderly environment, and training staff on cultural sensitivity (Woods 1995, PYN 2006, Aron 2006). Some programs engage in activities to help students build pride in their schools (Brush & Jones 2002) or create and strictly enforce fair and consistent codes of discipline (Steinberg & Almeida 2004; Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morrison 2006).

Who Is Involved

Deciding where to locate services is an administrative function, typically performed at the district level. It may involve an outside organization if the program is not located in a district-owned building.

Creating an inviting school climate involves the school administrators, teachers and staff. The physical layout of the building, the classrooms and the public spaces also contribute to a positive and inviting school climate.

Process

The information provided in the Promising Strategies section describes elements in the process of creating a welcoming physical space and a school climate conducive to student learning and academic achievement. Some of the strategies apply to an alternative high school setting and some are more applicable to a credit recovery lab within the regular high school.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and schools reporting "promising practice" in this area, the following program climate strategies have been particularly promising.

Strategy 1: Create a pleasant and inviting physical layout of the alternative high school, including the lobby/reception area, the corridors, the classrooms, library, and cafeteria; a layout that puts students and parents at ease. (Examples B, E, F, H, I, K)

Strategy 2: Establish a warm and welcoming atmosphere on the part of administrators, teachers and staff from the time a student comes to enroll and throughout the student's stay in the program. This will also facilitate the participation of parents in the student's reentry experience. (Examples A, B)

Strategy 3: Create small learning communities and foster a close relationship between students and staff where staff know each student by name and all staff members have a

stake in each student's success. (Examples A, B, E, F, H, I, J)

Strategy 4: Create an atmosphere of student success by placing students in classes where they can do well. (Example A)

Strategy 5: Celebrate student accomplishments frequently through displays of student work, awards and public acknowledgment of student achievement to build a sense of belonging and momentum toward graduating. (Examples C, G, L, M)

Strategy 6: Involve students in the upkeep of the school/facility to make them take personal responsibility and pride in their surroundings. (Example E)

Strategy 7: Give students the option to audit regular classes, spend time with their favorite teacher, and graduate with their high school class. (Examples C, D)

Supporting Examples

Example A:　　　*Socorro ISD*
　　　　　　　　Tier 3 District, Large District (38,357 students)

The alternative high school looks welcoming from the moment the student opens the door to enroll. The principal or director meets with each student. The principal or director explains the program to the student and accompanying parent. When students enroll they are placed in classes where they can experience quick success. This helps students believe that they can indeed succeed. The teachers are very helpful and give students a lot of personal attention. The availability of two counselors, a social worker and a nurse also helps students feel welcome. The students are very cooperative; they like the school. There are no discipline problems.

Example B:　　　*Lake Worth ISD*
　　　　　　　　Tier 1 District, Small District (2,751 students)

The school has a welcoming lobby—more like a living room—that makes both students and staff comfortable. The school has created a "homey" and inviting atmosphere. The administration and staff greet each student by name. Every few weeks the principal meets with every student to see how the student is doing, to check on the student's progress and let the student be part of the process. Staff members make personal phone calls home if students are missing school. Staff actually go to the students' homes and knock on doors. Students recognize that staff members have a personal interest in each student.

Example C:　　　*Deer Park ISD*
　　　　　　　　Tier 1 District, Medium District (12,421 students)

The alternative high school takes every opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate student success. The school has a "Clap Out" event when a student has reached his/her senior status. Everybody in the school gathers in the hallways and claps for that student. The school also has a ceremony to acknowledge perfect attendance and most credits per grade

level. Staff take photographs of these students and display the photographs in the hallways. The school also implements a "Salute to Success" program. Students attending the alternative high school enjoy the same benefits as traditional graduates have. The school has a prom, students send out invitations for their graduation, and they are able to graduate with the current graduating class at the regular campus.

Example D: Coleman ISD
Tier 1 District, Small District (996 students)

Coleman ISD allows recovered students under the age of 21 who attend a computer-based credit recovery lab to audit regular classes. This makes them feel part of the general student population, creating a sense of belonging. The principal recognizes that while the credit recovery program is individualized, students cannot do computer work day in and day out. They need sometimes to spend a day in a regular classroom and be part of a class. They need to feel connected to the general student population.

Example E: Sanford Fritch ISD
Tier 1 District, Small District (906 students)

The district has an alternative high school that opened in 1993 and houses all recovered dropouts. The facility is clean, inviting, and warm. The resource officer rides on the bus with the students; this makes the students feel welcome and part of the program. The students help keep the facility clean. Students also prepare the food for the school. These are part of the responsibilities that students undertake, involving them in the upkeep of the school and giving them a sense of ownership and responsibility.

Example F: Valley View ISD
Tier 1 District, Small District (670 students)

Valley View staff feels that giving recovered dropouts a space of their own to work is an important factor in keeping students in the program. Although at-risk students and recovered dropouts are on the high school campus, they do not mix with the rest of the students. They have a separate area where they can work one-on-one without being embarrassed by other students. The separate area they have makes them comfortable. It is especially beneficial to students who have been physically abused or are afraid of crowds; they feel more comfortable in a location within the school that is separate from the general population. If the student has a favorite teacher staff try to assign the student to that teacher's room where the student can work during that class period.

Example G: One Stop Multiservice Charter
Tier 1 School (1,140 students)

The school is constantly building and making changes to motivate and support students. Students are motivated by the displays of their work on the school's walls. All of the displays are based on themes like Disney characters, the animal kingdom, etc. The displays are on the walls the entire school year. The students also decorate the school

with their paper maché and water coloring works. The school encourages students' creativity.

Example H: Mineola ISD
*   Tier 1 District, Small District (1,564 students)*

The accelerated credit recovery program is inviting because it is informal and involves small groups. It is not intimidating to the enrolled students. Students are more willing to ask for help.

Example I: Bay Area Charter School
*   Tier 1 School (92 students)*

The small size of the school creates an atmosphere in which all students know each other and all teachers know all students. The low teacher-student ratio adds to the individualized instruction and caring atmosphere. There is also a close relationship with the parents. Parent involvement is encouraged (and required) from the time the student registers for the school. There is ongoing communication with the parents. There is a communication file for each student, where teachers record the details of all contacts with parents. Teachers can consult the file and look for patterns or emerging problems and concerns. It gives teachers a sense of what goes on at home. The high school building, which is a converted grocery store, is painted in pleasant colors and decorated with student work. This makes for a "cozy" school atmosphere.

Example J: Windfern High School, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
*   Tier 3 District, Large District (92,135 students)*

The Windfern High School environment mirrors that of a community college. It has a staff of nurturing teachers, highly accessible administrators and counselors, and an attitude of "failure is not an option." It is a small campus with a close-knit learning community. The staff ensures that students feel the cohesiveness and support of a small campus where every staff member looks out for every student and students develop a sense of belonging.

The school's philosophy is that every staff member is a teacher. The key to a successful program is its dedicated staff. Staff show a personal touch when they interact with students. Staff believe that for a school like Windfern to be effective they cannot have a weak link. Support staff have a close relationship with students. Staff feel that they make a difference personally ("I know that I am making a difference with the kids"); that they are needed. Staff make sure that students have at least one caring adult in their life. Some of the staff give students their home phone number and personal e-mail address so that students can contact them at home after school hours.

Example K: Presidio ISD
Tier 1 District, Small District (1,451 students)

According to recovery staff, walking into the school is like walking into a house. The school has a pleasant layout. Staff is welcoming. Students feel very comfortable.

Example L: *Sherman ISD*
Tier 1 District, Small District (6,424 students)

The Douglas Alternative Learning Center at Sherman ISD holds several events that give recognition to students and promote their progress. These promote a sense of success. The center has a Friday Recognition program. Every Friday teachers and students meet. Students with perfect attendance and students who completed courses are publicly recognized. Employers are also invited and they talk about the students who work for them. The center also has a Portfolio Night twice a year at which students' work is displayed. The center holds graduation ceremonies for students who complete all requirements. During the graduation ceremony, the student's family is invited and teachers talk about the student's accomplishments. A teacher reads a paper that the student wrote on what getting a high school diploma means to that student.

Example M: *Amarillo ISD*
Recommended District, Medium District (29,895 students)

North Heights Alternative School recovery staff believe that frequent recognition of student progress and a small, close-knit group of students are important to the school's success. When a student attains all his/her high school credits, the school holds a big celebration and maintains a display of students who have graduated. Last year, teachers helped students create a flash video about their school that is featured on the school web site. This, in turn, led to students creating a book about the school. Recovery staff believe that these activities have built a sense of pride and community among students and school staff.

III.3   Student Participation in Administrative Decisions

Objective

Increase students' responsibility for, sense of belonging to and ownership in the program by getting student input and suggestions regarding the organization and management of the program.

Promising National or Other State Practices

One aspect of fine-tuning dropout recovery/alternative education programs to the needs of students is to allow students, as some studies advocate, take an active role in making administrative and management decisions about programs (Steinberg & Almeida 2004, Harris 2006, Woods 1995).

Who Is Involved

In addition to the students, the principal, staff and teachers are involved in giving students a role and a voice in the program.

Process

The following steps are recommended for all districts and schools. However, the steps may be modified to fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

1. School administrators and staff recognize the importance of asking for student input, feedback, and suggestions concerning school organization, operations, administration, and service delivery as a means of increasing student involvement and sense of belonging.

2. School administrators and staff define opportunities for students to provide input, feedback and suggestions.

3. School administrators and staff develop procedures and associated forms and media for obtaining student input, feedback and suggestions.

4. School administrators make staff, students, and parents aware of student input opportunities and describe how student input will be used.

5. School administrators incorporate student input procedures into the campus improvement plan.

6. School administrator assigns staff to solicit student input.

7. School administrators and staff review students' input and use it as a source of information for decision-making, planning, and implementation of changes.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and schools reporting "promising practice" in this area, the following strategies have been particularly promising.

Strategy 1: Assign students to different committees such as the site-based committee, campus improvement plan (CIP) committee, curriculum committee, etc to represent students' interests and concerns. (Examples B, C, H)

Strategy 2: Elicit student input in an organized manner, through a group interview, individual interviews or a survey, when specific issues come up. (Example A)

Strategy 3: Ask for student input and suggestions on specific areas such as rules, curriculum, or principal and staff hiring. (Examples D, E, F, G, H)

Strategy 4: Obtain comments and suggestions about the school and program from each student upon his/her completion of the program. (Example B)

Supporting Examples

Example A: *Manor ISD*
                   Tier 1 District, Small District (5,098 students)

A few years ago, students were complaining about the way the study labs were set up and about the lack of a place where students could decompress outside of class. The principal asked the students to write a persuasive letter describing what they would like changed. The principal found the letter students wrote highly valuable. The students' suggestions resulted in changing the arrangement of study "carrels" in the computer lab and creating a break room for students. The changes implemented based on student recommendations showed the students that their voices were heard and increased their involvement and sense of ownership in the school.

Example B: *Amarillo ISD*
                   Recommended District, Large District (30,206 students)

During one of the weekly meetings North Heights Alternative School administrators decided that the promising way for creating a climate that meets students' needs was to listen to the students. At the end of the 2006-2007 school year, school administrators held an informal discussion with students to find out what they liked and did not like about the school, soliciting critiques and suggestions for needed changes to improve services. All students were given the opportunity to discuss the school and offer suggestions for improvement. Some interviews were with individuals while others were in a group format. The staff made an audio recording of the discussions. Student comments about the school were so interesting and positive that school staff decided to help students create a documentary video about the school, which is available on the school's web site (http://www.amaisd.org/sites/nheights/about_us.htm).

Students are assigned to several committees to voice their concerns and desires regarding the direction of the school. Because of the constant turnover of students, the feel of the school changes often as each group brings its own style and needs to the table. Administration attempts to be flexible to meet those needs.

In addition, school staff and students developed a book about the school – *Voices from the Heights.* The book was released in May 2008. The book, a collection of student essays, addresses the personal tragedies and triumphs of the students and how education has played a role in their lives. The students attended a book signing at Barnes and Noble that had a "fantastic turn out." Students were also able to log in online and check how the book sells in comparison to books by other authors. According to the principal, districts from all over the state purchased the book.

As a result of the successes the school experienced with the input students provide, the school now requires an exit interview upon graduation. The exit interview provides another opportunity for students to share with administration positives and negatives of the campus. Staff conducts an exit interview with each student. The exit interview is also used to obtain contact information and information on student plans after leaving the school. In the exit interview students are asked to critically evaluate their experience at North Heights and to suggest any specific changes they think should be made to the program. School administration uses this information as one source of information for program administration and staffing decisions. Specifically, students are asked for reasons they succeeded in the program; how teachers and staff helped them be successful; what they liked about the program; what they could have done differently to have been more successful; the skills and information they learned that are most beneficial to them; the most memorable thing about the program; reasons they would recommend the program to a friend; and any program changes or enhancements they suggest.

Example C: *Yoakum ISD*
              Tier 1 District, Small District (1,550 students)

Yoakum High School assigns one of the students to be on the campus improvement team. Including a student on the campus improvement team is effective because of the input the student provides, reflecting students' priorities and concerns.

Example D: *Presidio ISD*
              Tier 1 District, Small District (1,451 students)

The alternative high school involves students in administrative decisions. The school surveys students on different issues such as classroom management and curriculum and takes their input and recommendations into consideration.

Example E: *Socorro ISD*
              Tier 3 District, Large District (38,357 students)

Options High School surveys students about school rules. Student do not have input into the academic program because the curriculum is set with the primary focus not on variety but on instruction necessary for getting a high school diploma.

Example F: *Midway ISD*
              Tier 3 District, Small District (6,259 students)

The counselor meets with each student and goes through the curricular program. The program is a computer-based, self-paced credit recovery program and aided by teachers' instruction. The purpose of the meeting is to discern if the program is meeting their needs. Based on the results of the meeting which is informal, the counselor determines how to adjust the program for that student.

Example G: *Austin ISD*
              Recommended District, Large District (81,917 students)

Gonzalo Garza Independent High School students provide input on the effectiveness of the curriculum. Garza staff write the curriculum. It is in continuous development and adapted to individual student needs. Each course is customized for each student. Students tell the facilitators if the curriculum works for them. Students volunteer to field test new curricula and fill out evaluation forms. Every Friday students write in their journals about what worked well and what did not. The teachers review the students' journals. In multi-credit courses, students not only report weekly on the curriculum but also evaluate the course as a whole.

Students will also have a voice in the selection of a new principal. Students will develop a profile of the principal they would like to have.

Example H: Harris, Linda. *Learning from the Youth Opportunity Experience: Building Delivery Capacity in Distressed Communities*. Center for Law and Social Policy, January 2006.
              http://www.clasp.org/publications/youthopportunity_report.pdf

The federal government awarded in 2000 Youth Opportunity Grants to 36 high-needs communities in severe economic distress. The goal of the grants was to begin building capacity within these communities to improve opportunities for economically disadvantaged youth. The Youth Opportunity Center created through the grants were required to provide educational support, workplace and career support, youth development activities, and case management support to youth 14 to 21 years old. Students were to be served by these centers until they completed academic programs and successfully transitioned into career or higher education opportunities. By the end of the fifth year, more than 90,000 (mostly minority) students were enrolled in the programs. Successful strategies used to get youth involved in the programs included involvement of youth in the design of facilities and in management decision-making.

For example:

- In Detroit, the youth senate provided critical programmatic feedback and ideas that were incorporated into youth programming. Youth were also used as peer counselors and recruiters.
- In Baltimore, youth management teams participated in the facility design and had input into program development and development of incentives. Youth were also trained to serve on advisory councils and participated in the interview and selection of staff.
- Each of the four Houston youth centers had a youth council composed of students. They assisted with planning and implementing special services. They also developed entrepreneurial projects to fund their activities, thereby developing leadership and business skills.
- In Seattle, youth who served on the advisory board had two-year terms and received academic or vocational credit for their internship on the board. They helped design all youth activities.
- In Pima, members of the Youth in Action Council received facilitation training and designed and implemented a peer survey that involved 700 students. They also designed a service-learning program and implemented service-learning projects in the community.

IV.   Program Staffing

IV.1 Recruiting and Hiring Effective Staff

Objective
To identify the key qualities of staff and successfully recruit and hire effective program staff.

State of Practice
Districts and charter schools do not tend to have programs exclusively for recovered dropouts. The programs in which recovered dropouts enroll, such as alternative academic high schools or credit recovery or TAKS remediation classes in a regular high school, also serve other at-risk students.

At the district level, the person responsible for dropout recovery is usually (76.9 percent) also the person responsible for dropout prevention. In addition to the principal or principals responsible for the program at the school level, on average, the program directly involves an administrator, 7.6 academic teachers, 1.2 vocational teachers, 2.2 counselors, 1.8 tutors, 1.7 aides and 0.6 employment specialists.

The number and type of staff involved vary greatly, because of the way that districts and charter schools define "directly involved in dropout recovery." In districts where the responsibility for the program is vested with the high school principal, all staff of the high school may be classified as being part of the program. In districts where the dropout recovery program is located in the alternative academic high school, the number of staff across all categories is small. Furthermore, only 52.5 percent of the districts and charter schools have vocational teachers in the program, 46.1 percent have employment specialists, 45.5 percent have tutors, and 33.4 percent have aides.

More than 30 percent of districts and charter schools with dropout recovery programs listed finding qualified staff for the program among their key challenges.

Promising National or Other State Practices
Studies emphasize the need for high-quality, motivated staff (Steinberg & Almeida 2004). In particular, staff assigned to work with at-risk youth, including teachers, administrators, counselors, and others, should demonstrate a keen interest in working with this population as opposed to having these students "foisted" upon them (Woods 1995, Aron 2006). Staff must also honestly believe that they can make an impact and help students (Martin & Halperin 2006). Some research suggests that volunteers may be more invested in programs than paid staff (Stern 1986).

A survey of dropout prevention and recovery programs noted that when contacting superintendents' offices to identify the person responsible for dropout prevention and recovery, if that person was quickly identified, he/she was much more articulate and knowledgeable about the programs than if it took several referrals and phone calls to

reach the appropriate person. The implication is that when the programs are well planned and organized, with visible structure, the community will be more aware of the programs and the programs will also be more accessible to the community (Hoyle & Collier 2006).

Who Is Involved

The responsibility for overseeing dropout recovery programs at the district and school level can rest with a variety of departments and staff members. In general, those responsible for the development and implementation of dropout recovery at the top level—either at the district or school—should be involved in defining staff member roles and responsibilities and in hiring staff. In addition, staff members who work directly with recovered dropouts – such as counselors, teachers, aides, and tutors – can provide valuable input into the tangible and intangible qualities required to fill the position effectively. Parents, recovered students, and community members who work with dropouts may also provide valuable insight into the qualities needed to work with these students.

Process

The following steps are recommended for all districts and schools. However, the steps may be modified to best fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

1. Create job descriptions for staff members involved in dropout recovery, which may include:
   - Specific roles and responsibilities within the program and outside of the program (such as cross-departmental collaboration).
   - Experience with and commitment to working with at-risk youth and with recovered dropouts.
   - Communication skills required (particularly with respect to parent and student communication, including second-language fluency).
   - Responsibilities that demonstrate to candidates that they have a "say" in program decisions.
   - Intangible qualities required for staff members to be successful, such as a belief that all students can succeed, ability to establish good rapport with students and parents, and dedication to work tirelessly to help students succeed.

2. Target specific populations of potential candidates that may embody the qualities and experience described above, such as retired teachers, counselors, and social workers. Consider cultivating volunteers who may be more intrinsically motivated to help at-risk students as potential staff or aides.

3. Consider team interviewing of candidates, including those staff members who work most directly with recovered dropouts as well as student representatives.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and charter schools reporting "promising practice" in this area, the following strategies have been particularly promising in attracting, recruiting, and hiring high-quality staff.

Strategy 1: Emphasize the intangible qualities required to fill the position, including communication skills, and a belief that recovered dropouts can be academically successful and graduate from high school. (Examples A, B, C, D, E)

Strategy 2: Create a welcoming environment to put candidates at ease, and demonstrate to candidates that they will have input into programmatic decisions. (Examples C, D)

Strategy 3: Use team interviewing to provide layered insight into job candidates' potential and suitability for the work. (Example A)

Strategy 4: Consider cultivating volunteers or allowing instructional staff to volunteer for assignment to dropout recovery programs, as they may be more intrinsically motivated to work with this student population. (Examples C, F)

Supporting Examples

Example A: *Manor ISD*
                   Tier 1 District, Small District (5,098 students)

When hiring new staff for his school, the principal of Manor Excel High School focuses as much on the candidate's intangible qualities as on specific skills and experience. Candidates may "look great on paper," but if they do not possess an intense drive to help highly at-risk students, he knows they will ultimately not succeed in the position. The principal also conducts team interviews with each candidate. Having school staff participate in the interviewing process ensures not only that the selected candidate possesses the skills and qualities needed to succeed, but also demonstrates to his staff that he respects and values their opinions.

Example B: *Katy ISD*
                   Tier 3 District, Large District (51,201 students)

Katy ISD dropout recovery staff emphasize that at the program coordination level, recovery staff must truly believe that every child deserves a second chance—that "there is no expiration date on helping kids." In a large district like Katy, district-level recovery staff must also set an example for school staff about how recovered students should be treated, using prompt, frequent, and, respectful communication. Treating recovered students professionally and courteously sends other staff members and school personnel the message that these kids are worthwhile and deserve another chance at an education. Being treated respectfully, in turn, motivates students to give school another try.

At the district level, recovery staff must understand the policies and procedures of

multiple departments within the school district—from credit rules, to accountability formulas, parental involvement activities, and more. Staff members sit on several district-wide committees, such as the Committee for Safe and Drug Free Schools.

Recovery staff must also be skilled and open communicators. Frequently, recovered dropouts and their parents are angry because they feel that no one at the school or district has listened to them. In fact, this alienation is often part of the reason why a student dropped out. So recovery staff must be able to demonstrate that they hear and understand parents' and students' frustrations and needs. In addition, staff must be willing to be "on call" any time of day or night. Katy ISD staff check their e-mail frequently and always answer their cellular phones. "What if the one time (a dropout) decides to call for help, you're not there?"

Example C: *Lake Worth ISD*
Tier 1 District, Small District (2,751 students)

Lake Worth ISD's alternative high school employs a job coach and an at-risk specialist who work directly with the school principal. According to recovery staff, when these two positions came open, both staff members re-applied because they wanted to continue working with the students. The job coach was with the district for eight years in another capacity before substituting at the alternative high school, at which point the job coach realized he could make more of an impact working directly with at-risk students.

Recovery staff indicate that overcoming candidates' perceptions about "at-risk students" can be a challenge. Candidates may assume the students are troubled or may be fearful of the school environment. Recovery staff indicate that they often "win over" job candidates by making the building a welcoming, comfortable place. For example, the school lobby looks more like a living room than a traditional school lobby.

Example D: Aron, L.A. *An Overview of Alternative Education*. The Urban Institute, January 2006.
http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411283_alternative_education.pdf?RSSFeed=UI_Adolescents.xml

According to this report from the Urban Institute, successful alternative education programs tend to involve staff that are highly motivated to work with this student population. In addition, these staff members are provided opportunities for significant input and decision-making in programmatic decisions, which empowers and motivates them to perform well.

Example E: Woods, E. Gregory. *Reducing the Dropout Rate.* Northwest Regional
                   Education Laboratory, March 1995.
                   http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/9/c017.html

This survey of research on promising dropout prevention and recovery programs found
that the quality and collegiality of program staff was of high importance in creating and
sustaining an effective program. In particular, research findings showed that in selecting
program staff, schools and districts should consider candidates' "aptitude"—the
intangible qualities that result in a strong belief in and commitment to serving at-risk
youth. In addition, research indicated that program staff must foster a "climate of
collegiality" which, in turn, makes parents and students feel welcome in the program.

Example F: Stern, David. *Dropout Prevention and Recovery*. California
                   University, Berkeley School of Education, February 1986.
                   http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/00
                   00019b/80/1c/41/b7.pdf

This report on why dropout prevention and recovery efforts in California were
unsuccessful, found that most dropout prevention and recovery programs were staffed by
uncertified instructional staff. The report advocates building dropout recovery staff
through voluntary reassignment or transfer, as staff would likely be more intrinsically
dedicated to the success of the program. The report also notes that volunteers including
parents, peers, police, and other "mentors" play an important role in dropout prevention
and recovery programs.

IV.2   Professional Development

Objective

To provide sustained, high-quality staff development to ensure ongoing effectiveness of program staff.

State of Practice

Only one district with a dropout recovery program—North East ISD—reported professional development as a "promising practice." Yet, several national studies emphasize the need for high-quality and ongoing professional development to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of program staff.

Promising National or Other State Practices

An emphasis on professional development for "youth workers" (i.e., staff from any of multiple agencies who work with out-of-school youth) can improve overall program results by creating an overall higher level of professionalism and increasing the quality of these staff (Harris 2006, Woods 1995, Aron 2006).

Using a train-the-trainer model to augment program staff and enable students to access services in a variety of places has also shown to be an effective professional development strategy (Weiler 1994). For example, a New York City program trained healthcare workers at clinics and hospitals to identify pregnant teens and assist them in accessing programs designed to keep them from dropping out or if they dropped out to return them to school (Weiler 1994).

Who Is Involved

Any staff directly involved in recovering students who dropped out and working with recovered dropouts should be considered part of the dropout recovery "team," and should be involved in ongoing professional development efforts. This may include district staff (either formal "dropout recovery staff" or any district staff member charged with recovering and re-entering dropouts), as well as school staff (in particular, the school principal and any counseling or instructional staff working directly with recovered students).

Process

The following steps are recommended for all districts and schools. However, the steps may be modified to best fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

1. Determine which staff members at the district and school level comprise the "dropout recovery team."

2. Determine the ongoing staff development activities that will most directly impact the effectiveness of the dropout recovery staff.

3. Implement staff development regularly, and continue to follow up with staff to

determine the effectiveness of staff development activities and need for additional staff development.

Promising Strategies

Based primarily on information collected from national research, the following strategies have been particularly promising in providing effective, sustained staff development.

Strategy 1: Include in your professional development activities all those working with recovered dropouts—both in the district as well as staff members from local or state agencies providing services to your recovered dropouts—to improve the overall professionalism and reach of the dropout recovery program. (Examples A, B, C)

Strategy 2: Use a train-the-trainer model to promulgate effective practice to youth workers outside the school or district setting so that they can help recover dropouts. (Example C)

Strategy 3: Provide opportunities for instructional staff working with recovered dropouts to engage in professional development that expands their repertoire of instructional skills and provides opportunities for observing teaching in other settings. (Example B)

Supporting Examples

Example A: Harris, Linda. *Learning from the Youth Opportunity Experience: Building Delivery Capacity in Distressed Communities*. Center for Law and Social Policy, January 2006.
http://www.clasp.org/publications/youthopportunity_report.pdf

While this report, which analyzed the implementation of federal Youth Opportunity Grants, does not specifically address dropout recovery efforts, it has implications for dropout recovery programs because its program deals specifically with a similar student population—students who are at risk of dropping out or have already dropped out of school. The Youth Opportunity Grant programs demonstrated that the ability to serve youth well depended greatly on the quality of the case management staff. Successful programs invested in training and professional development. Unfortunately, when federal funding ended, most of these well-trained staff members left because the community could no longer sustain their salaries.

Example B: Aron, L.A. *An Overview of Alternative Education*. The Urban Institute, January 2006.
http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411283_alternative_education.pdf

This report on the status of alternative education programs in the U.S., describes ongoing professional development for instructional staff as a characteristic of successful programs. In particular, professional development for instructional staff should "help them maintain an academic focus, enhance teaching strategies, and help the teachers develop alternative instructional methods." According to the report, effective aspects of

professional development include "teacher input, work with colleagues, and opportunities to visit and observe teaching in other settings."

Example C: Weiler, Jeanne. *Project Return and Babygram Hospital Outreach, 1993-94*. New York City Board of Education Office of Educational Research, 1994.
http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/00 00019b/80/16/5f/5e.pdf

In this program, aimed at recovering pregnant teens in New York City, project staff used the "train-the-trainer" approach to expand its dropout recovery efforts. Program staff trained healthcare workers at local clinics and hospitals to identify pregnant teens, who were typically at high risk of dropping out, and to provide them with counseling and information about alternative education programs they could access to continue their education after the birth of their children.

V. Collaborative Partnerships

V.1 Cross-System Collaboration

Objective
To coordinate dropout recovery efforts across local government and non-government agencies and organizations to maximize services and minimize student barriers to high school completion.

State of Practice
More than one-third (37.8 percent) of districts and charter schools with dropout recovery programs reported collaborating with other state and municipal agencies to deliver services to recovered dropouts. Most districts and charter schools reported working with these agencies to identify and recover dropouts. Most frequently, districts and charter schools work with local law-enforcement agencies including Juvenile Justice (63.2 percent). More than one-half of the districts and charter schools also mentioned working with specific departments and offices in the district such as the migrant education office, homeless education liaison or the at-risk office.

Promising National or Other State Practices
Cross-system collaboration has been identified as a key factor in successful dropout recovery programs—albeit difficult to achieve (Hoye & Sturgis 2005, NLC 2007, Harris 2006, PYN 2006). Typically, small programs operate in isolated "pockets of success," and even within a single community, programs and options for out-of-school youth may not be aligned or easily accessed from a single entry point (Hoye & Sturgis 2005).

Yet, the cross-system approach carries key benefits. First, collaboration changes individual systems in addition to creating an effective "superstructure" and enables scarce resources to be used more efficiently and effectively. Cross-system collaboration also benefits the youth served by each organization, providing a consistent message and easy access to multiple supports as well as spotlighting any existing gaps in service (NLC 2007).

A critical challenge to achieving this cross-system collaboration is the inertia of the systems themselves. Some programs reported particularly low levels of involvement from child welfare and mental health agencies, despite the fact that these agencies were probably among the most critical partners (Harris 2006). Without a strong leader (such as a mayor) or particular impetus (such as a significant federal grant program) for initiating collaboration, it will not happen (Hoye & Sturgis 2005; NLC 2007, Harris 2006).

It is also critical for a single agency that has consistent, sustained capacity to act as a coordinating body for dropout recovery efforts. It can be any agency—as long as it makes sense given the population of students at risk of dropping out (NLC 2007, Harris 2006). For example, Philadelphia has focused on establishing a collaborative planning team that includes multiple-agency staff, private businesspersons, school staff, and community

members and on coordinating youth data across multiple agencies (AYPF 2006). Corpus Christi is working with the National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families to build strong municipal leadership for a cross-system focus on out-of-school youth (Steinberg & Almeida 2004).

Who Is Involved

Effective cross-system collaboration must begin with the establishment of a "convening entity." That is, one person or department at the district or school must be made responsible for recruiting, convening, coordinating, and maintaining collaborating groups. In cases where no one person or department is responsible, it is highly unlikely that effective cross-system collaboration will be sustained over time. It is also critical to identify a single point of contact at any of the collaborating agencies that will be responsible for communicating with district or school staff. At the district level, this should be the person most directly associated with dropout recovery, such as the dropout prevention/recovery program manager, student services coordinator, at-risk youth coordinator, etc. At other government and non-government agencies, this should be the person who has the most complete knowledge of the services the agency provides to this student population.

Process

The following steps are recommended for all districts and schools. However, the steps may be modified to best fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

1. Establish a single point of contact for cross-system collaboration. This contact person should:
   - Be involved in dropout recovery on a day-to-day basis.
   - Be aware of and able to articulate the status of dropout recovery efforts, the goals and supporting activities of the dropout recovery program, and the barriers dropouts face in re-entering the school system.
   - Be a skilled communicator capable of balancing the needs, constraints, and resources of multiple agencies.

2. Determine the specific agencies that should work together on a broad-based dropout recovery effort. Such agencies may include:
   - A central governing authority (e.g., Mayor's Office, City Council, etc.) that can "evangelize" the message of the dropout recovery efforts across multiple local agencies and ensure that collaborative efforts are maintained by all agencies involved.
   - Workforce Councils, which typically can provide significant additional funding and support for out-of-school youth.
   - Juvenile Justice agencies that can quickly identify students who have been incarcerated and refer them to recovery staff.
   - Health and Human Services agencies that can assist in removing barriers to student re-entry (by providing healthcare, childcare, food stamps, homeless placements).
   - Foster Care system, which can aid in locating students in the foster care

system that may have dropped out and working with foster families to reenroll students.
- Other offices within the school district whose interests intersect with dropout recovery efforts (migrant student programs, homeless education liaisons, etc.).
- Local governmental task forces whose interests intersect with dropout recovery (e.g., teen pregnancy task force, gang violence task forces, etc.).

3. Convene a planning meeting with members from all agencies and develop a formal plan including:
   - Specific goals and action plans for the collaborative team (such as eliminating barriers to needed social services, improving referrals across agencies, pooling funds to broaden identification and recruitment efforts).
   - The specific roles and responsibilities of each collaborating agency (e.g., to organize and convene the team, to provide data on specific student populations, to develop a specific tool such as a guide to social services for dropouts and their families).
   - A single point of contact for each collaborating agency.
   - The frequency with which the team will meet.

4. Maintain effective collaboration on an ongoing basis by:
   - Reminding contacts of upcoming meetings and checking in frequently on progress toward goals and activities.
   - Providing agendas for each meeting to ensure that collaborative efforts remain focused and effective.
   - Following up after meetings to assign specific tasks to collaborative team members.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and schools reporting "promising practice" in this area, the following strategies have been particularly promising in building and sustaining cross-system collaboration.

Strategy 1: Develop formal inter-local agreements with collaborating agencies. (Example A)

Strategy 2: Develop a referral network through a variety of agencies to build capacity for identification and recruitment. (Examples B, C)

Strategy 3: Include surrounding school districts to facilitate records transfer and identification and location of students who dropped out. (Examples B, C)

Strategy 4: Enlist local agencies to assist in eliminating barriers to student success, such as access to housing and healthcare. (Example C)

Strategy 5: To sustain long-term collaboration, create a relationship in which partnering agencies receive assistance from the district or school. (Example C)

Supporting Examples

Example A: *Presidio ISD*
           Tier 1 District, Small District (1,451 students)

Because Presidio is so isolated, the town has to be self-sufficient. As a result, there is an extensive network of collaboration between the district and community organizations and agencies. The school district has inter-local agreements with several city and county organizations and agencies, including homeless shelters, border patrol, Mental Health and Mental Retardation (MHMR), Health & Human Services Commission, and Child Protective Services.

Example B: *Bay Area Charter School*
           Tier 1 School (92 students)

Bay Area Charter has developed an informal network of referral sources to locate and recruit dropouts. Although the school has no formal agreements, the network includes counselors from the 11 public school districts surrounding the school, the District Attorney's office, and local drug rehabilitation agencies.

Example C: *Lake Worth ISD*
           Tier 1 District, Small District (2,751 students)

Lake Worth ISD collaborates with a variety of public agencies. First, the district maintains a close relationship with surrounding school districts. Tarrant County, Fort Worth, and Castleberry ISD work together to facilitate records transfer, to perform background checks on students, to provide sibling information, and to alert the originating school district if a student who transferred failed to enroll in the receiving district.

The district also works very closely with the Health Department. The Health Department provides training for the district, such as parenting workshops. Health Department staff also come to the campuses to give immunizations to students so that students do not have to miss school. The Health Department operates a car seat program to provide low-cost car seats for students who have children after they complete a brief safety course.

The Juvenile Justice system also works with district staff to identify potential dropouts, calling the Department of Student Services whenever a student is in their system.

According to district staff, one of the keys to maintaining a high level of collaboration is providing reciprocal support. For example, staff from the Health Department are part of the district's advisory board. In turn, when these partners receive new grants they consider how the program can help the district

V.2 Collaboration with Private Industry and Business

Objective

To engage private industry and business in a variety of activities designed to identify, recruit, and ensure the educational persistence of recovered dropouts.

State of Practice

Less than one-quarter (21.7 percent) of the districts and charter schools responding to the statewide survey reported collaborating with local businesses and industry.

Promising National or Other State Practices

Engaging local businesses in defining critical workforce skills and setting appropriate proficiency levels is considered a promising approach (Hoye & Sturgis 2005; Almeida, Johnson & Steinberg 2006, Harris 2006). This approach ensures that career preparation program components address both short-term and long-term career goals and needs. One report specifically challenged business leaders to develop "industry pipelines" that clearly delineate knowledge and skills needed to advance at each level of job within a particular industry (PYN 2006).

Who Is Involved

As with cross-system collaboration, having a single department or staff member responsible for establishing and maintaining ongoing collaboration with local business is critical. Input from vocational teachers or other school staff that provide career support to students to identify appropriate and needed supports from local businesses and industry is also recommended.

Process

The following steps are recommended for all districts and schools. However, the steps may be modified to best fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

1. Identify the type of support local industry and business can provide, e.g.,
   - Dropout identification and recruitment.
   - Flexibility in work schedules to accommodate recovered dropouts.
   - Assistance in defining workforce readiness competencies or providing opportunities for recovered dropouts to learn about the world of work or particular industries and businesses.
   - Assistance in developing or augmenting vocational offerings.
   - Funding support.

2. Engage in active outreach to local businesses and industry to garner support (as described above). For example, attend or speak at local business organization meetings, such as the local Chambers of Commerce, rotary club, etc.

3. Invite local business and industry members to sit on dropout recovery planning

and implementation teams and task forces. Note that Workforce Councils are responsible for many of these functions and can be used to handle this task.

4. Maintain effective collaboration on an ongoing basis by:
   - Reminding contacts of upcoming meetings and checking in on progress toward goals and activities frequently.
   - Providing agendas for each meeting to ensure that collaborative efforts remain focused and effective.
   - Following up after meetings to assign specific tasks to collaborative team members.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and Texas districts and schools reporting "promising practice" in this area, the following strategies have been particularly promising in building and sustaining collaboration with local industry and business.

Strategy 1: Invite local industry and business members to sit on advisory committees. (Examples A, B)

Strategy 2: Work with local businesses and industry to place students in after-school or summer jobs. (Examples A, B)

Strategy 3: Evangelize the good work of the district and schools to local businesses and industry to maintain interest and support. (Example B)

Supporting Examples

Example A: *Valley View ISD*
                    Tier 1 District, Small District (670 students)

Valley View ISD has representatives from the local feed mill sit on the school's site-based committee. The feed mill also provides summer jobs for students.

Example B: *Coleman ISD*
                    Tier 1 District, Small District (996 students)

Coleman ISD's vocational education teacher works with local businesses to place students in various jobs. The district also works closely with the local Economic Development Board, which provides job and employability training through a Community Career Center.

According to recovery staff, "evangelizing" the program to local businesses and industry organizations is key. The high school principal makes speeches at community-based organizations to explain what the district is trying to accomplish and what has been accomplished. By emphasizing the positive things that are happening at school, he is able to maintain the interest and support of these local business organizations.

V.3. Other Collaborative Partners

Objective

To engage other collaborative partners as suitable for the particular student population, to fill in with services the district or other collaborative partners are unable to provide, and to expand the reach of dropout recovery programs beyond school district boundaries.

State of Practice

According to the statewide survey, aside from collaboration with government agencies and local businesses, districts and schools also work with a myriad of community organizations (39.8 percent), including social service providers (31.8 percent), churches and other faith-based organizations (22.4 percent), homeless shelters (13.7 percent), migrant worker organizations (6.4 percent), and local hospitals and healthcare or treatment centers (12.0 percent). Typically, these organizations provide identification and recruitment support, and in some cases provide services to students on campus.

Promising National or Other State Practices

Collaboration is a broad-based term that encompasses many specific practices, including collaboration within governmental systems to create and sustain programs (as addressed in V.1 Cross-System Collaboration), collaboration with other public and private entities to provide specific services to dropouts, and even collaboration between students and community organizations. Community collaboration as a general practice is widely identified in the literature as a key factor in successful dropout recovery programs (Steinberg & Almeida 2004, Woods 1995). Many programs also engage students in community service projects as a way of demonstrating tangible results from their efforts, building self-esteem, and connecting students to their communities (Cranston-Gingras 2003, Martin & Halperin 2006).

Who Is Involved

District or school recovery staff should be involved in identifying and coordinating with appropriate collaborative partners. As described in *Process* below, collaborative partners should be selected based on their contact with, or the services they can provide to students who have dropped out. Examples of collaborative partners include, but are not limited to:

- Chambers of Commerce;
- Economic Development Boards;
- Homeless shelters;
- Drug and alcohol abuse treatment centers;
- Private therapists;
- Faith-based organizations;
- Community-based organizations (such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters);
- Hospitals and clinics.

Process

The following steps are recommended for all districts and schools. However, the steps may be modified to best fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

1. Identify additional collaborative partners based on the needs of the specific population of dropouts:
   - Reflect on the characteristics of the population of dropouts (see *Chapter VIII* and *Chapter XII*).
   - Create a list of potential collaborative partners that have frequent contact with the specific population. For example, if a high percentage of dropouts have substance abuse problems, local treatment centers (public and private) should be collaborative partners. If a high percentage of dropouts are homeless, local shelters should be collaborative partners.

2. Determine the specific needs each collaborative partner can fill:
   - Identification: Collaborative partners can be used to create a referral network to notify schools when a student with whom they interact may have dropped out.
   - Recruitment: Collaborative partners can be provided with information packets about re-enrollment options and be trained to counsel parents and students who have dropped out to re-enter school.
   - Retention: Collaborative partners can provide mentoring services and work with the district or school to create a seamless transition from a particular program back into school.

3. Contact key staff members from potential collaborative partners and convene a planning meeting to develop a formal plan including:
   - Specific goals and action plans for the collaborative team (such as eliminating barriers to needed social services, improving referrals, pooling materials or funds to broaden identification and recruitment efforts).
   - The specific roles and responsibilities of each collaborative partner (e.g., to provide referrals; to provide material, funding, or staff support; to assist in recruitment, etc.).
   - A single point of contact for each collaborative partner.
   - The frequency with which the team will meet.

4. Maintain effective collaboration on an ongoing basis by:
   - Reminding contacts of upcoming meetings and checking in on progress toward goals and activities frequently.
   - Providing agendas for each meeting to ensure that collaborative efforts remain focused and effective.
   - Following up after meetings to assign specific tasks to collaborative team members.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and schools reporting "promising practice" in this area, the following strategies have been particularly promising in building and sustaining collaboration with local community organizations.

Strategy 1: Collaborate with local nonprofit organizations to identify and recruit dropouts. (Example A)

Strategy 2: Collaborate with local nonprofit organizations to provide additional supports to recovered students. (Examples B, C)

Strategy 3: Collaborate with local Workforce Councils to coordinate and provide services for out-of-school youth. (Examples D, E)

Supporting Examples

Example A: *Bay Area Charter School*
      Tier 1 School (92 students)

Bay Area Charter has developed an informal network of referral sources to locate potential students. In addition to neighboring school district staff and other local agencies, these referral sources include:
- Church ministers who talk to families and find out that their child dropped out;
- Families in Crisis – a battered women's organization;
- Professional counselors in private practice;
- Drug rehabilitation agencies or treatment centers.

Example B: *Coleman ISD*
      Tier 1 District, Small District (996 students)

Coleman ISD staff found out about a program called "Just for People" that operates out of Abilene. The program targets 16-21 year olds and provides a variety of support. Just for People staff help Coleman ISD students fill out college applications, take the students to visit the local college or provide transportation funds for college visits, and follow up with students past graduation up until their 21st birthday. Coleman ISD staff indicate that this organization helps students who have experienced a great deal of failure in their life feel that they have someone who believes they can succeed.

Example C: *Bangs ISD*
      Recommended District, Small District (1,136 students)

Bangs ISD staff also work with Just for People. The organization pays for transportation to college entrance exams, pays the exam fees, and purchases clothing for job interviews.

Example D:　　　*Morton ISD*
　　　　　　　　Tier 1 District, Small District (508 students)

Morton High School works through Upward Bound in partnership with South Plains College and the Texas Workforce Council to get students into college or to set up a work-based program so students can earn work credits while they attend school.

Example E:　　　*Presidio ISD*
　　　　　　　　Tier 1 District, Small District (1,451 students)

Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande is one of 28 workforce development boards in Texas. Presidio ISD works with Workforce Solutions to provide vocational training in occupations such as nursing, security officer, and welding. In addition, the organization provides GED preparation. Workforce Solutions has an office on the campus.

VI. Identification and Tracking of Students Who Dropped Out

Objective

To identify in a timely manner students who dropped out and track them in order to get them back to school.

State of Practice

The Texas statewide survey of school districts and charter schools showed that nearly all districts and charter schools with a dropout recovery program use either a dropout recovery team (85.9 percent) or an individual specialist (11.4 percent) to identify, track and recover students who have dropped out. Districts also collaborate with other organizations in this effort. Most frequently, districts and charter schools work with local law-enforcement agencies including Juvenile Justice (63.2 percent). More than one-half of the districts (53.8 percent) also work with specific departments and offices in the district such as the migrant education office, homeless education liaison or the at-risk office. Districts also work with a myriad of community organizations (39.8 percent), including state or municipal social service providers (31.8 percent), churches and other faith-based organizations (22.4 percent), local businesses (21.7 percent), homeless shelters (13.7 percent), migrant worker organizations (6.4 percent), and local hospitals and healthcare or treatment centers (12.0 percent).

Promising National or Other State Practices

One of the most important aspects of successful dropout recovery programs is how these programs track their dropouts and get them back on track. The literature describes a variety of methods for identifying and recruiting students.

Defining dropout characteristics (i.e. profiling) is considered one of the most promising strategies because it enables program staff to focus their tracking and recovery efforts in the most appropriate location. In order to develop dropout recovery programs that respond to individual student needs, many schools, cities, and states use data to create "profiles" of school dropouts. These profiles may be created in a variety of ways. Philadelphia and New York use robust, inter-agency data to correlate student dropout with a variety of school and social factors. Oregon, which has collected student-level information on dropouts since the early 1990s, asks recovered dropouts why they dropped out and uses this data to structure its prevention and recovery programs (Brush & Jones 2002, NYCDOE 2006, PYN 2006).

Tracking and recovering dropouts can be accomplished using a range of approaches. One of the more innovative and promising strategies is the saturation approach that programs funded under the federal Youth Opportunities Grants used. These programs tracked and recovered 62 percent of out-of-school youth. This approach uses multiple outreach channels such as events geared to young people; peer-to-peer outreach; involvement of youth in the design of facilities and in management/decision-making; including activities in the arts, culture, sports and recreation; and use of youth in community mapping and

survey activities (Harris 2006). Other programs track dropouts through civic and cultural organizations to which dropouts are likely to belong, such as migrant farm labor organizations (Cranston-Gingras 2003).

Who Is Involved

Depending on the size and configuration of the district or school, staff members most directly responsible for identifying students who dropped out include the PEIMS clerk, principal or assistant principal, attendance officers, dropout prevention/recovery specialists, parent liaisons, community liaisons, teachers and counselors. The person responsible for dropout recovery will head the identification and tracking effort. Some districts create a district-wide task force. Districts also use community members as volunteers in a reach-out and tracking campaign. Districts may also involve adult education providers, state or municipal social service providers, faith-based organizations, local businesses, homeless shelters, migrant worker organizations, and local hospitals and healthcare or treatment centers.

Process

The following steps are recommended for all districts and schools. However, the steps may be modified to best fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

Districts with multiple middle and high schools should develop a district-wide dropout identification, tracking and recovery program. The program should be managed from the central office but include staff from each of the secondary schools. Small districts with a single middle school and high school should have school-based dropout identification, tracking and recovery programs.

The district/school should have a well-articulated process in place including assigned staff and materials to identify, track and recover dropouts. The most productive method is to identify and track dropouts on a continuous basis throughout the school year rather than mount an effort only at the beginning or at the end of the school year, or to blend the two approaches. Both approaches are described below.

Continuous, Throughout the Year, Identification and Tracking

1. Identification/Classification of Dropouts

   The category of dropouts includes two types of students: (1) students who withdrew from school to re-enroll in another school or district and did not and (2) students who directly dropped out of school.

   A. Follow up with students who withdrew from school to ensure that they are enrolled in the district/school in which they planned to enroll.

   B. Classify students for whom enrollment information cannot be verified as dropouts.

C. Classify students who stopped coming to school as dropouts.

D. Get frequent reports (from the PEIMS clerk or another district staff assigned to identify dropouts) on students who dropped out of school (i.e. weekly, every two weeks, monthly) throughout the year.

E. Get student and next-of-kin contact information though PEIMS for these students.

2. Tracking of Dropouts

A. Contact students who dropped out as soon as feasible after they drop out. The sooner dropouts are tracked the higher the likelihood of finding them and persuading them to come back to school.

B. Develop talking points for phone contact and home visits. These talking points should enable staff to identify the reason the student dropped out, articulate available options, and persuade the student that he/she can be successful in the chosen educational pathway.

C. Assign district and school staff to contact and track dropouts.

D. Contact dropouts first by phone. Assign staff who know the dropout to call him/her.

E. Contact next-of-kin of dropouts whose phone numbers are disconnected or wrong and get information on where that student is or how the student and family can be reached.

F. Visit homes and neighborhood of dropouts for whom contact information is not available to find current contact information. For home visits, assign staff who know the dropout to visit him/her and match ethnic/racial or language characteristics of the visiting staff with the characteristics of the dropout. Develop a packet of materials to leave with the dropout or his/her family. The materials should describe the economic disadvantages of not completing high school and the options the dropout has when coming back to school. Include a personal note signed by a teacher or staff member the dropout is close to. Also include district or school contact information.

G. Ask students who knew the dropout about his/her whereabouts and how to get in touch with him/her.

Annual Identification and Tracking Initiative

1. Planning

   Develop a plan for the annual dropout tracking and recovery initiative. The plan should address:
   - A detailed timeline for the initiative. For example, will the effort be done at the end of the school year or at the beginning of the school year?
   - Resources needed to implement the initiative. Resources may include office space, phones, supplies, number of staff and volunteers.
   - Who will be involved and their specific responsibilities, including district and school staff, students, parents, and community members.
   - If community members are involved, develop a publicity campaign to recruit volunteers from the community.

2. Publicity

   Publicize the dropout tracking and recovery initiative in the district using multiple media such as local newspapers, radio and television; distribute posters in all schools, in supermarkets, eating places, public libraries, churches, community centers; post information on the town/city website and district website. Hang large banners over the street and on public buildings. Have local newspapers—including publications in languages other than English—publish an article about the initiative.

3. Training

   Develop a program to train participants. Train participants how to handle the list of dropouts (to be FERPA compliant); how to approach dropouts and their families; what information to convey; and how to report results back to the district.

4. Materials

   Develop a set of materials such as flyers, posters, brochures and an information kit to leave with dropouts and their families.

5. Identification

   Create a list of students who dropped out and get PEIMS student and next-of-kin contact information for each student. Include students who withdrew from school to enroll in a different school or district but did not enroll.

6. Set-up Phone Banks

   Make available a room with phones where callers, using the list of dropouts and contact information can call. Develop a phone tracking form for callers to record the results of the phone calls for each dropout. Develop phone calling and information giving/seeking procedures and train callers in those procedures. If feasible, assign dropouts to callers who know them or have the same ethnic/racial or language profile.

   Record outcomes of calls on the phone tracking form; i.e. contacted dropout; disconnected or wrong phone number; dropout no longer lives at that address; new address; address not known, etc. If caller contacted dropout, record reason for dropping out, what dropout is doing at present (whether dropout is working); intention to come back to school; conditions under which dropout will come back to school, etc.

   Prepare report on results of calls to dropouts and next steps for each dropout contacted, such as, sending the dropout a packet of materials with options; need for home visit; contact by principal or another district staff to persuade dropout to come back to school.

7. Organize and Implement Home Visits

   Visit dropouts not reached by phone or those who callers indicated should be contacted in person. Home visits are typically implemented in a single day. The time allocated for home visits, the number of dropouts that need to be visited, and the number of home visitors will dictate how many dropouts will be assigned to each home visiting volunteer.

   Decide whether to assign dropouts to home visitors by geography (assigning dropouts who live in close proximity to each other), based on familiarity (whether the dropout knows the home visitor or has a similar profile), or a combination of both. Assignment by geography is more efficient. Assignment by familiarity may be more productive.

   Choose whether to assign single volunteers or pairs to visit dropouts at home. Using pairs may be more productive because it may allow teaming of experienced and inexperienced volunteers and matching dropout and volunteer profiles.

   Train volunteers visiting homes of students who dropped out how to introduce themselves to the dropout or to family; what message to communicate regarding importance of completing high school and what options are available. Train volunteers in contacting neighbors of dropouts for whom no telephone and current address is known. The objective of visiting neighbors is to find out where the student is and how to contact him/her. Train volunteers in completing a home visit form for each dropout visited with results of visit and next steps to be taken.

Prepare an information kit volunteers should give to dropout or family or leave by the door if no one was home.

8. Prepare a Tracking Report

Using data from the phone and home visit tracking forms, prepare a report summarizing how many dropouts were identified, how many were traced, how many were contacted by phone, how many were visited and the results of the phone contact and home visits. The report should also include data on the number of information packets sent to dropout, given to the dropout or family in person, or left at the dropout's door.

In addition, the report should include information obtained from dropouts, such as, reasons for dropping out; current status (whether dropout is working; type of job, full/part-time, etc.); dropout's inclination to return to school; and conditions under which dropout will return to school. The district/school can use this information to develop recovery strategies for each dropout. Finally, the report should have a list of dropouts that could not be tracked.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and schools reporting dropout identification and tracking initiatives, the following strategies have been particularly promising in ensuring the identification and tracking of dropouts. Examples from responding school districts and schools provide additional detail.

Strategy 1: Publicize the district's dropout outreach and recovery initiative in different media and locations such as the local newspaper, radio, television, street banners, supermarkets, eating places that students frequent, the public library, churches, community centers, public buildings, city/town web page, district web page, and schools. (Examples A, E, F, I, K)

Strategy 2: Develop an information kit that can be sent to, given to or left with the dropout or his/her family. The information kit should include a letter from a school staff member who knows the dropout; information on differences in earnings for dropouts, high school graduates, and college graduates; options available to the dropout; and contact information for returning to school. (Example B)

Strategy 3: Use multiple strategies to contact dropouts: phone, home visit, contact with next-of-kin, contact with neighbors, etc. (Examples A-E) Large districts may consider the use of phone banks for contacting dropouts and their next-of-kin. (Examples D, E, K)

Strategy 4: Assign district and school staff (e.g., principal, counselor, teacher, parent liaison) who know the dropout to contact him/her by phone and visit his/her home. Assigning a staff member whom the dropout knows enhances trust and makes persuasion more effective. (Examples B, D, G)

Strategy 5: Ask fellow students to provide contact information for dropouts. (Examples B, D, K)

Strategy 6: Match ethnic/racial and bilingual characteristics of recovery staff/team with the respective characteristics of the dropouts. (Examples B, H)

Strategy 7: Collaborate with local law enforcement and other agencies to identify and track dropouts. (Example H)

Strategy 8: Develop and implement an extensive dropout recovery outreach initiative involving district and school staff, students, and community members tracking dropouts. (Examples A, D, E, I)

Strategy 9: Implement an ongoing, year-round dropout identification and tracking program. (Examples A, C, J)

Strategy 10: Inform dropouts about options available to them using innovative means such as Grand Prairie's "Launch Your Life Dropout Recovery Fair." (Example F)

Supporting Examples

Example A: Pharr San Juan Alamo (PSJA) ISD
*   Recommended District, Large District (30,300 students)*

In August 2007, PSJA ISD convened the Dropout Prevention and Recovery Task Force and implemented an aggressive dropout prevention and recovery initiative titled "Countdown to Zero." The initiative's goal was to account for and recover every school leaver from 2006-07. The initiative is a collaborative effort between the PEIMS clerks and the district's 26 campus community liaisons to identify those who are potential dropouts or who actually dropped out. As part of this initiative, PSJA ISD implemented a Dropout Recovery Walk targeted at students who dropped out. The walk included the respective principal of the school from which the student dropped out and a dropout specialist. Both visited each dropout. One of the high schools used staff members to visit homes of students who dropped out on Saturdays, over a three-week period.

PSJA ISD has recognized the need to check in a timely manner the status of students who withdraw from school, verify that they have indeed enrolled somewhere else, and track those that have not enrolled where they indicated. PSJA ISD has instituted daily tracking of students that are unaccounted for in the month of September. At the beginning of the 2007-08 school year, PSJA ISD had 1,211 potential dropouts and 191 migrant students that did not show up in school. By September 28, 2007 using verification and dropout recovery strategies, PSJA ISD reduced the number of potential dropouts to 253 and the number of migrant students they could not track to 20. The Countdown to Zero Initiative reduced the district's annual dropout rate for grades 7 through 12 by almost one-half from 4.1 percent in 2006-07 to 2.2 percent by Fall 2007. In 2007-08, PSJA had 453 student withdrawals and was able to track all by 42.

PSJA's initiative also targets seniors who did not pass TAKS or who miss two or fewer credits as these are likely to drop out. PSJA ISD campus community liaisons visit these students in May and again in August and offer them a fifth-year option, a College, Career and Technology Academy the district has opened jointly with a local community college.

Example B: *Austin ISD*
Recommended District, Large District (81,917 students)

Gonzalo Garza Independent High School is an open-enrollment/open exit high school operating year round with students from throughout the district. Previously, the staff waited until June to track students who dropped out. This strategy was not productive. Instead, the school hired a dropout specialist who tracks students that withdrew or dropped out on a continuous basis. When a student withdraws, the dropout specialist follows up with the student to make sure that the student is indeed enrolled where he/she reported they would enroll. The dropout specialist even takes the student to the orientation at the school where he/she enrolled if it is in the district. The dropout specialist also stays in touch with these students' teachers. The teachers call the dropout specialist if the student drops out.

In the last two years, Gonzalo Garza Independent High School has been employing "dropout hunters." The dropout hunters are teachers and counselors and work in pairs/teams. The approach is non-threatening. The teams are personalized to match the characteristics of the students they try to track. For example, a team tracking limited English proficiency students will have a team member who is bilingual. The team will also match the ethnic/racial profile of the students being tracked. The school uses one of the professional development days to track dropouts.

The teams have a combination of staff with experience and without experience in tracking dropouts. Each team selects four dropouts that team members know. This method of assigning dropouts to teams required teams to go all over the district to track students. To make team efforts more efficient, the school is considering assigning dropouts to teams based on geography. The teams find that the evening hours are the most productive for tracking students, both during the week and the weekend. Some teams call the dropout before coming to the door. The dropout hunters meet mid-day to discuss how well they did and exchange ideas. The team members also have a packet of materials to give to the dropout or his/her family. The packet of materials includes a hand written note from a staff member who was close to the student, a "We Missed You" flier, a "Why You Must Come Back" flyer, information on the GED testing center, Home School Fact Sheet and daycare information. In 2008, Garza Independent High School plans to implement the Dropout Hunters Initiative in June and in August over a two-day period. The dropout specialist asks students if they know how to find dropouts that the teams were not able to track. She also encourages students to come to the office with information on students who dropped out.

Example C: Socorro ISD
                Tier 3 District, Large District (38,357 students)

Socorro ISD restructured its dropout recovery program in 2006-07. Instead of waiting until the end of the year to track students who dropped out, each high school reviews its dropout lists every two weeks and attempts to track and recover dropouts. Options High School staff, the district's alternative high school, review the list of its students weekly and go after students who dropped out of the program.

Each high school has a campus committee that is in charge of recovering students who dropped out. The committee consists of the assistant principal, counselor, registrar, attendance/truant officer, attendance clerk, and nurse. The committee meets every two weeks to review dropout lists and leaver lists. The committee verifies that the leavers have enrolled in the schools or districts they reported intending to enroll and tracks dropouts and tries to recover them. At the end of the year, the district engages in a campaign to track and recover dropouts not tracked during the year.

Until last year the district engaged in a massive campaign at the end of the year, calling all students who dropped out. Where no phone numbers were available or were no longer valid, school staff made home visits. The campaign was effective with dropouts they could contact. However, many dropouts could not be found. They were able to recover only 25 percent of the dropouts. Realizing that it is not productive to wait until the end of the year, the district changed to a system where dropouts are tracked every two weeks. This new system appears to be more effective. In 2006-07, each of the high schools had 60 to 80 dropouts; this year, the number is in the teens.

Example D: Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
                Tier 3 District, Large District (92,135 students)

The Cypress-Fairbanks ISD dropout recovery infrastructure consists of attendance officers at the district level and a dropout liaison on each campus. The district uses multiple programs and strategies to identify and track dropouts.

The district installed an automated calling system with phone messages to students who have not shown up in school. Parents call back with information on where the student is (e.g., student lives with the other parent, student attends private school), helping the district determine whether the student dropped out and locating the student.

At the beginning of the year, the dropout liaisons call all students who withdrew and students who did not show up in school. The PEIMS clerk prints out a list of all students with a 98 Leaver code. This Leaver code refers to "Student was not enrolled within the school-start window for a reason not listed, student dropped out, or reason for leaving is unknown." The dropout liaisons request confirmation from districts where withdrawing students were supposed to enroll. If the district does not get confirmation that this student enrolled in that school or district, the school contacts the student's home by telephone. If the phone number is incorrect, the school contacts the next-of-kin. If the next-of-kin

contact information is invalid, the liaison pays a visit to the student's home or writes a letter to the last known address. The program has allowed the district to track most of its dropouts. At the beginning of 2007-08, 3,000 students were coded 98; 600 of those were dropouts. By March, the district tracked all but 397.

Attendance officers contact students who dropped out and inform them about the different education options the district can offer to them.

The schools have a team that assists with tracking dropouts. Team members make phone calls, visit homes and talk to neighbors. The high schools also post a Wanted List in the schools so that students can help identify those who dropped out. The district and all high schools also participate in the annual "Reach Out to Dropouts Walk" that takes place at the start of the school year (September).

Example E: *Alief ISD*
                 Recommended District, Large District (45,696 students)

Alief ISD implemented the Reach Out to Dropouts Walk Program jointly with Houston ISD, Spring Branch ISD, Aldine ISD and Cypress-Fairbanks ISD. The program used a media blitz for volunteer recruitment and the search for dropouts. The program involved local business owners and apartment managers. Businesses hung banners in their stores to publicize the initiative and encouraged students to go back to school. Program staff also asked business owners to alert schools when kids were hanging around near their businesses.

The initiative created phone banks to reach students who dropped out. The phone banks used PEIMS data for a two-year period with student and next-of-kin contact information. Volunteers made calls and recorded results, sent post cards to students who could not be contacted by phone, and sent letters that addressed reasons why kids drop out of school (failed TAKS, under credited, working, children, care of elderly parent) so students could respond with the reasons why they dropped out. The district recruited and trained 216 volunteers. The district provided volunteers with talking points to address reasons for dropping out. For example, when students who dropped out said they had to work, volunteers informed them that Alief has an evening school. The volunteers went door to door to the homes of students who dropped out, talked to about 168 students and gave them a card for a district staff member they could contact to get back to school. The effort recovered nine students.

Example F: *Grand Prairie ISD*
                 Recommended District, Medium District (25,000 students)

Grand Prairie ISD, a district with 25,000 students, implemented a "Launch Your Life Dropout Recovery Fair" in February 2, 2008. The fair is based on a program that the South Dakota schools developed. The fair represents coordinated and standardized dropout recovery efforts district wide, replacing dropout tracking and recovery activities that individual middle and high schools implemented. The fair was a result of a district

committee of school principals that met in December 2007 and concluded that dropouts do not come back to school because the high schools do not meet their needs.

The district launched a media blitz in English and Spanish to advertise the fair to dropouts and potential dropouts. The media campaign consisted of posters, brochures and assistance from the district's Communications Department to get the word out about the fair and that dropouts do have choices. The brochures included information on the economic and social disadvantages of not having a high school diploma (dropouts are eligible for only 12 percent of new jobs; earn only half of the income that high school graduates earn; female dropouts are more likely to be very young and single parents; dropouts are more likely to engage in risky behavior).

The fair is for recent dropouts and for others who have not received a high school diploma due to attendance, state testing, required credits or other hardships. The first fair was held on the first Saturday in February so that students could sign up for TAKS and get TAKS remediation (Grand Prairie High School had an open enrollment for TAKS remediation class). The district created a phone bank with the names of 500 to 600 dropouts and tried to contact all of them. Most of the telephone numbers did not work (about 70 percent). The district mailed a letter to dropouts with no good phone numbers and got about 30 percent of the letters back because of wrong addresses.

The fair brings together a variety of resources available to students who have not earned a high school diploma. These resources include options not just for earning a high school diploma but also for further schooling, GED and career opportunities. Organizations are invited to participate (have a table) at no charge. The district invited representatives from charter schools; private schools; Grand Prairie schools; trade schools such as ITT Tech, cosmetology (beauty) school, barber college; community colleges and universities including Mountain View College that has open enrollment; a GED testing center; and Armed Forces recruiters; community services; industry; representative from the Texas Workforce Commission and the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) school program; district Career and Technical Education (CTE) counselors, social workers, and parent liaisons; and local businesses and industry. About 100 dropouts attended the fair.

Example G: Presidio ISD
Tier 1 District, Small District (1,451 students)

Presidio is a border town in West Texas and very isolated. It has a population of 6,000. The geographic location of the town and the large distance from other towns sets the tone for its education programs, including dropout prevention and recovery. Because of its isolation, "kids can't disappear." People know each other and the district staff know the people in the community. The principal, counselor and parent liaison in each school act as a dropout prevention and recovery team. The high school parent liaison contacts dropouts by phone, visits their homes, and tries to convince them to come back. The respective teacher of the student who dropped out also contacts the student. Between seven and nine students drop out every year. Typically those who drop out (90 percent)

have most or all of their credits but failed to pass TAKS.

Example H: Sherman ISD
*   Tier 1 District, Small District (6,424 students)*

Sherman ISD, a district with more than 6,400 students, has a task force for dropout prevention and dropout recovery. The task force includes the assistant superintendent, secondary principals, migrant education director, and the local justice of the peace. The task force meets three times a year to assess how well the district is doing in these areas and what additional strategies are needed. The district has a Hispanic staff member who goes to homes of Hispanic students who are truant or dropped out to get them back to school. The district collaborates with the local Juvenile Justice Commission, which hired people to locate truants and dropouts and bring them back to school.

Example I: Weslaco ISD
*   Recommended District, Medium District (15,933 students)*

Weslaco ISD, a district with about 16,000 students started a dropout recovery program two years ago to get all students back to school by the end of September. The district recruited school staff and community members to go into the community to find dropouts and recover them. The district developed a list of dropouts using PEIMS data. The district advertised the reach out initiative in local media outlets. The district also used its migrant coordinators to contact migrant students, visit, and try to bring them back.

Example J: Hearne ISD
*   Tier 1 District, Small District (1,162 students)*

Hearne, a district with 1,162 students, keeps a close eye on at-risk students. Once a student is classified as a dropout, the at-risk coordinator calls the student and visits his/her home, encouraging this student to come back to school. The at-risk coordinator uses PEIMS student and next-of-kin contact information throughout the year to contact students who dropout as soon as they leave school. According to the at-risk coordinator, the district succeeds getting 80 percent of the dropouts to come back to school. Because the community is small and the school staff are well integrated into the community, kids cannot just disappear.

Example K: Lake Worth ISD
*   Tier 1 District, Small District (2,751)*

At the start of the school year, Lake Worth ISD follows-up students who withdrew from the district the previous spring to ensure that they enrolled in the district or school they had indicated at time of withdrawal. The district considers students whose enrollment in another district or schools cannot be verified as dropouts. In the earlier years the district relied on "grapevine information," about such students. But, in the last few years as the district has grown and blends into three other districts, Lake Worth has adopted a more formal approach to dropout identification and tracking.

Currently, the at-risk coordinator is charged with tracking dropouts. Before it was up to the principal, the GED Program, and teachers to track dropouts. The district publicizes its dropout recovery efforts and credit recovery program in the community. Local churches help by distributing flyers about the program to their congregations. District staff make presentations in churches on dropout recovery. The district posts flyers on bulletin boards in the courthouse, local clinics, and local stores such as Wal-mart, grocery stores, and laundromats. The district also enlists its truancy officers and probation officers to help identify and contact dropouts. In addition, the district enlists the help of its neighboring districts and counties.

The dropout tracking initiative involves all staff. The principals ask students' help in tracking dropouts that they were not able to contact. The principals use the speaker system asking students if they know how to contact specific students who dropped out. Students are typically a good source of contact information for such dropouts. Tarrant County, Fort Worth, and Castleberry ISD that surround Lake Worth ISD help the district verify whether students who withdrew from Lake Worth enrolled in schools in these counties or district. The counties also help to get contact information for students who withdrew from Lake Worth schools.

Staff contacts the families of students who dropped out through telephone and home visits. Staff also "does a lot of knocking" on doors of neighbors of dropouts they were not able to contact. The at-risk coordinator and other school staff visit the homes of students who dropped out and invite them to come back to school using the credit recovery program as an incentive. The at-risk coordinator and staff emphasize the flexible scheduling, the nine-week cycle, availability of childcare, transportation to and from school and free breakfast and lunch, including meals for the babies. Another incentive is the availability of a college and career coach who works with students on SAT, jobs, job applications, and college applications and financial aid forms. The face-to-face contact and personal invitation is very effective in getting dropouts to come back to school.

VII. Re-enrollment - Intake

VII.1 Case Management Approach

Objective
To provide comprehensive, individualized plans for recovered dropouts and a mechanism for ensuring consistent and sustained follow-up.

State of Practice
According to the statewide survey, only 8.4 percent of districts and charter schools that have dropout recovery programs provide a formal case management approach for recovered students, although many of the schools and districts contacted for interviews indicated that they utilize such an approach informally.

Promising National or Other State Practices
The case management approach allows coordination of services at intake (Weiler 1994, Harris 2006) and also ensures follow-up (Woods 1995).

Who Is Involved
Staff involved in case management will vary somewhat depending on whether dropout recovery efforts are organized at the district level or at the school level. In some large districts, district-level staff maintain case files and follow up on every student recovered back into school, often with the assistance of site-based staff including principals, counselors, and instructional coaches. In some cases, particularly in smaller districts, student case files are maintained at the school level, either by the principal, the counselor, or administrative staff. In general, the availability of staff resources and the proximity to the student population should be considered in selecting a centralized versus local case management approach.

Process
The following steps are recommended for all districts and schools. However, the steps may be modified to best fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

1. Create an intake form that specifies both academic and social supports needed for each student. The intake form should include, at a minimum:
   - Academic data;
   - Attendance data;
   - Disciplinary data;
   - Pregnancy/parental status;
   - Housing status;
   - Transportation needs;
   - Economic/job issues.

2. Assign responsibility for consistent and sustained student follow-up to a staff member—whether at the district level or school level—and develop a schedule for reviewing each student's case file.

3. Maintain a case file for each recovered student in a centralized location that is regularly updated with academic and personal information.

4. Ensure that the staff member assigned to follow-up on the student's progress does so according to the specified schedule and addresses academic and social issues in a timely manner.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and schools reporting "promising practice" in this area and the literature review, the following strategies have been particularly promising in using a case management approach to successfully re-enroll and serve dropouts.

Strategy 1: Ensure that *all* factors contributing to the student dropping out of school are addressed in the initial student plan and that staff assigned to assist recovered dropouts have knowledge of and access to services outside of the educational arena (e.g., healthcare, housing, childcare, and other social services). (Examples B, C)

Strategy 2: Create a centralized repository for student case files so that institutional memory is preserved. (Example A)

Strategy 3: Ensure that follow up is personalized and sustained over time. (Examples A, B)

Strategy 4: Actively cultivate positive relationships between case managers (or district or school recovery staff) and school staff to ensure that recovered students' transition back into school is a positive one. (Examples A, B)

Supporting Examples

Example A: Katy ISD
*   Tier 3 District, Large District (51,201 students)*

Katy ISD employs two district-level staff members to lead dropout recovery efforts, as well as academic coaches on three of their campuses who are charged with following up on recovered students.

District staff open case files on all dropouts and recovered dropouts. According to district staff, there is a "24-hour rule" whereby any student that drops out (identified through any means, including leaver reports, school staff, parents, peers, or others) gets a phone call within 24-hours of district staff being notified.

District staff pull all available records (e.g., academic, disciplinary, and attendance

records), as well as family contact information and any available socio-cultural information (e.g., language issues, pregnancy or parenting status, homelessness or housing status, etc.) from district computer files. Prior to speaking with the dropout or his/her family, district staff carefully analyze student records to come up with an individualized "game plan" for that student based on the specific challenges the student has. Next, a district staff member contacts the student or his/her parents and listens carefully to what the student and parent feels about why the student dropped out and what outcome they would like to pursue.

Based on all of the information available from school records and student/parent discussions, district staff create a plan of action that may include recovery into the student's home school, recovery into the district's "school of choice" (alternative education program), an online credit recovery program located at the student's home school, or another alternative outside the school district altogether (such as Job Corps, community colleges, GED Programs, charter schools, or private schools).

If a student is not recovered back into the school district, district staff continue to contact the student to determine whether he/she pursued the options they discussed and to ensure that the student knows it is never too late to return to one of the district's completion options.

If a student is recovered back into the home school (either as a full-time student or using credit recovery), or into the district's alternative program, district staff prepare the school registrar for the return of the student, so that the recovered student does not experience any barriers to reenrollment.

Once the student is re-enrolled, the academic coach takes over student monitoring. However, district staff monitor the work of the academic coaches closely to ensure each student is receiving appropriate services and is on the "right track" to graduation. District staff continue to maintain student case files to ensure that all records pertaining to the student (including logs of any communication with or about the student) are kept in a centralized location. In addition, district staff continue to intervene with school staff if needed to ensure that recovered dropouts' needs are being met.

According to district staff, the centralization of monitoring is overwhelming, but critical. First, by maintaining all student case files at the district, the staff can be certain of each student's status at any given time. In addition, it is important to demonstrate from the top down that every case is important and that personalization of services is critical. Also, this detailed case management approach builds institutional memory, ensuring that students' progress will be easily apparent to any new staff coming into the program and that monitoring of progress will be consistent over time.

Example B:　　Weiler, Jeanne. *Project Return and Babygram Hospital Outreach, 1993-94*. New York City Board of Education Office of Educational Research, 1994.
http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/16/5f/5e.pdf

This program focused on parents of elementary school children who never completed high school and on teen parents in danger of dropping out in New York City. The cornerstone of both aspects of the program was a case management approach, in which a case manager was assigned to each dropout or potential dropout from recruitment, through planning and follow up.

According to the program evaluation report, case managers "successfully" identified students in need of services. While the recruitment rate did not change over the years studied, the number of students placed in educational settings did increase. In addition, of the Babygram Program cohorts studied (pregnant teens at risk of dropping out or who had already dropped out), 59 percent either graduated from high school or persisted in attending school. The study also found a "significant impact" on the academic achievement of the children of Project Return parents (dropouts who were recovered back into school through a special program for teen parents) versus children of non-Project Return parents.

Program evaluators found that case workers frequently had to address non-educational issues (such as healthcare, childcare, housing, and self-advocacy skills) before they could address educational issues. Consequently, program evaluators recommended expanding the training of case managers to enable them to better serve their charges' non-educational needs.

The evaluation found that students experienced challenges in transitioning back into educational settings. Evaluators recommend that case managers strengthen their relationship with regular school staff to ease transition for students back into regular high schools.

Example C:　　Harris, Linda. *Learning from the Youth Opportunity Experience: Building Delivery Capacity in Distressed Communities*. Center for Law and Social Policy, January 2006.
http://www.clasp.org/publications/youthopportunity_report.pdf

The purpose of this report was to analyze the implementation of federal Youth Opportunity Grants that were awarded to 36 high-needs communities in 2000. The communities selected were diverse—urban, rural, and Native American—but were connected by their severe economic distress. The goal of the grants was to begin building capacity within these communities to improve opportunities for economically-disadvantaged youth.

At the heart of each community's program was a "Youth Opportunity Center" created to

offer a safe haven for youth (14-21 year-olds) and serve as a "focal point for case management." These centers were required to provide educational support, workplace and career support, youth development activities, and case management support. Students were to be served by these centers until they completed academic programs and successfully transitioned into career or higher education opportunities.

The report demonstrated that the ability to serve youth well depended greatly on the quality of the case management staff. Successful programs invested in training and professional development. However, when federal funding ended, in most cases these well-trained staff members left because the community could no longer sustain their salaries.

VII.2 Application for Readmission

Objective

To develop and implement a seamless readmission process to an alternative education program that underscores all stakeholders' responsibilities for minimizing or removing prior barriers to successful education.

State of Practice

The Texas statewide survey of school districts and charter schools showed that about 60 percent require students who dropped out to re-apply for admission. To be re-admitted, recovered students are required to have a certain credit threshold in 40.5 percent of the districts and charter schools with dropout recovery programs. More than three-quarters of the districts and charter schools also require recovered students to maintain a certain attendance rate. About one-fifth of the districts and charter schools require recovered students to maintain a certain grade point average. These requirements stem from the fact that poor academic performance and low attendance were the two primary dropout reasons that affect the largest percentage of recovered students.

Promising National or Other State Practices

Academic alternative education programs typically require students to submit applications or to meet other criteria. Programs may also require students to sign contracts ensuring that they will meet specific achievement and attendance benchmarks. Having to sign a contract solidifies students' commitment to the program (Martin & Halperin 2006).

Who Is Involved

Depending on the size and configuration of the district or school, staff members most directly responsible for monitoring the student's academic, attendance, and disciplinary status should be involved in reviewing the student's application and participating in a re-admittance meeting. A school counselor, academic coach, or other staff member may also participate in the review of applications and re-admittance meeting. It is also critical for the student's parent (or another "advocate" for the student) to be actively involved in the re-admittance procedure, as they will be a key source of support for the student throughout his/her academic career. Parents may be required to fill out part of the application, should be required to sign the application, and should be included in any re-admittance interviews, meetings, or conferences. Students should also be required to complete at least part of the application. By reflecting critically on the reasons he/she dropped out in the first place and planning for how these obstacles will be overcome, the student takes greater ownership of his/her academic career and has a clear vision of what he/she needs to do to graduate.

Process

Districts and schools have standardized paperwork that students must complete for admission. However, individual schools or programs may also require students to complete additional applications or contracts designed to ensure that the student and

his/her parents or guardians are aware of and committed to following the steps necessary to ensure success in the program. The following steps are recommended for all programs. However, the steps may be modified to best fit the program's specific needs and composition.

1. Create a Student Application, which may include:
   - Student, parent, and other family contact information.
   - Information about the student's home campus.
   - Student background information, such as parenting status, past disciplinary issues, past incarceration, past absenteeism.
   - Student work status.
   - Academic information from the home campus, may be completed by home-campus principal or counselor; may require attachments as applicable such as most recent TAKS scores, current report card or progress report, transcript, individualized education plan (IEP), etc.
   - Goals for the future.
   - Self-reflective section, typically focusing on why the student dropped out in the past and why the student feels he/she will be successful after re-admittance.
   - Other non-educational needs.
   - Statement of what the student/parent agrees to do in order to be considered for re-admittance, with student and parent signatures required.
   - Some schools have attached a cover-sheet "checklist" for the parent indicating the steps in the re-admittance process that must be completed (in order) as well as key documentation (such as proof of residency, immunization records, etc.) that are required for re-enrollment.

2. Require all students applying for re-admittance to return a completed application.

3. Review application with all applicable staff, such as principal, teacher(s), counselor(s), academic coach(es).

4. If the student is a good candidate, hold re-admittance interview including student, parent, and applicable school staff.

5. If the student is re-admitted, remind student and parent of his/her responsibilities and provide a specific follow-up contact for communication once the student is back in school.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and schools reporting "promising practice" in this area, the following strategies have been particularly promising in ensuring a smooth and high-quality re-admittance process. Examples from responding school districts, schools and national research provide additional detail.

Strategy 1: Incorporate behavioral and academic requirements students must meet and maintain in order to remain in the program. (Examples B, C, D, E)

Strategy 2: Involve parents in the application and admission process to ensure they understand what the student must do to successfully complete the program and what parents can do to assist students. (Examples B, D)

Strategy 3: Have students engage in self-reflection to determine why they dropped out and how they will overcome these challenges in the future. (Examples A, D)

Supporting Examples

Example A: *Coleman ISD*
                    Tier 1 District, Small District (996 students)

When a student is recovered back into school, he/she must develop a "self-reflective letter of purpose." These letters are highly individualized because not two students drop out for the exact same reasons. The school principal meets with the student to discuss the specific reasons—both academic and personal—why the student dropped out of school. Recovery staff report that it is particularly critical for students to reflect on non-academic challenges that contributed to the student's dropping out and plan for how these challenges will be eliminated or at least addressed moving forward. The student writes a letter describing specifically how he/she will overcome each of the challenges identified.

Example B: *Sherman ISD*
                    Tier 1 District, Small District (6,424 students)

Students who want to enroll in the Douglas Alternative Learning Center must fill out an application. First, the student and his/her parent have to go to the home campus counselor and fill out the application. The counselor forwards the application to the at-risk counselor at the alternative learning center. The alternative learning center does not accept students with discipline problems because it wants to provide a safe environment for its students. Applicants have to demonstrate that they have not had any discipline referrals six weeks prior to their application.

The secondary counselor takes the application to the Douglas Alternative Learning Center principal. The center sets up an interview with the student and his/her parent. The center has a student and parent orientation every Thursday after school. The entire staff is present at the orientation, giving the student and his/her parent an opportunity to meet each of them. The purpose of the orientation is for the students and parents to understand program expectations. It is also to promote a partnership among the students, parents and the staff.

Example C: *Socorro ISD*
                   Tier 3 District, Large District (38,357 students)

Incoming students must fill out an application. The application is partially filled by the home campus if the student is referred to the program; the student transcript is forwarded to Options High School, so that the student's academic needs can be determined. The student's TAKS record is also forwarded. The principal interviews the student and his/her parent, identifies the student's needs and brings in appropriate staff to meet with the student. Counselors also meet with the student. If the student needs a job, the co-op teacher becomes involved. The nurse assesses the student's health care needs.

Example D: *Amarillo ISD*
                   Recommended District, Medium District (29,895 students)

Students either referred to North Heights Alternative School from other Amarillo high schools or recovered dropouts must complete an enrollment application. The application gathers significant data about all family members (whether attending school or not), the student's academic status, the student's work status, and the student's reasons for applying to the program. The application also requires students to write a personal statement, which is considered carefully by the screening committee. Both students and parents are required to sign the application before it will be considered.

All students attending North Heights Alternative School (whether referred from another high school or recovered dropouts) must also abide by a point system. Students enter the program with a certain number of points (standard for all students). Students earn points for attendance and class completion and lose points for tardiness, absenteeism, or discipline issues. Every Thursday, North Heights staff review the status of each student's points. Students that are very low on points meet with staff to discuss the reasons they are low. Students with a high number of points are rewarded with schoolwide recognition and gift cards. Students that reach zero points or lower are removed from school for two weeks. These students must attend a reinstatement meeting with their parents where teachers and staff discuss the specific reasons the student lost points. If a student that has been reinstated loses all their points a second time, that student is permanently removed from the program. School staff find this practice effective because it underscores for students the importance of maintaining a positive attitude while in school and attending classes to ensure success. In addition, this practice minimizes disruption to students who are diligently completing their class work.

Example E: *Austin ISD*
                 Recommended District, Large District (81,917 students)

Gonzalo Garza Independence High School in Austin was created as an alternative school for students already enrolled in another Austin high school, and for those who had already dropped out. To enroll, students must submit a written application and must have at least 10 credits.

VIII. Program Options

VIII.1 Tailoring Program Options to Student Needs

Objective

To provide a variety of options for high school completion that meet the needs of a diverse population of dropouts.

State of Practice

According to the statewide survey of districts and charter schools, recovered dropouts are offered a variety of options for completing high school. Overwhelmingly (72.2 percent) districts and schools offer recovered dropouts an alternative day school. Options affording more flexibility are less-commonly offered to students, including an e-school (26.8 percent), an evening school (19.4 percent) or an independent study high school where they can earn credits through correspondence courses (23.4 percent).

The educational programs reflect some flexibility in attendance. More than 80 percent of the districts and charter schools offer morning (84.3 percent) and afternoon classes (80.9 percent). More than one-quarter offer evening classes and e-classes. Typically, classes are offered five days a week (86.3 percent) and 31.4 percent offer classes year round.

Promising National or Other State Practices

Most of the research analyzed emphasizes that a variety of options tailored to the individual reasons that caused students to drop out must be provided in order for an overall recovery effort to be successful. Rather than replicating an entire program model that appears to be successful in one school, district, or state, segmenting features of successful programs and identifying their specific benefits can help a school or district create its own unique, successful program that truly meets the needs of its dropout population (Stern 1986). However, it is also important to create balance and consistency within and across dropout recovery strategies to avoid a "hodge-podge" approach, which tends to be ineffective (Hoye & Sturgis 2005).

Program options should be carefully selected based on the number of students needing a particular type of program, and synthesized to create a "seamless service package" (Hoye & Sturgis 2005, NYCDOE 2006, Woods 1995, Brush & Jones 2002).

Who Is Involved

Determining the appropriate options for a district's or school's specific population is essentially an administrative function (e.g., a district- or school-level function). However, to ensure that the program options offered address the needs of a diverse student population, administrative staff should also involve any district- or school-level staff directly serving recovered dropouts.

In addition, recovered students and their families may provide valuable insight into the program options that will most effectively eliminate barriers to school success and result

in high school completion.

Finally, state and district laws, regulations, and procedures regarding the privacy of student information may create barriers to obtaining complete and accurate data on the dropout population. It is advisable that recovery staff work closely with district and school legal staff and maintain communication with any governing agencies (such as school boards, chartering organizations, TEA, etc.) to ensure a transparent process that adheres to established privacy rules.

Process

The following steps are recommended for all districts and schools. However, the steps may be modified to best fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

1. Determine the specific risk factors that cause students to drop out. These risk factors will likely differ from school to school, district to district. Multiple risk factors may intersect within a student population. For example, a school or district may find that the majority of its dropouts are over-age, under-credited. These students may feel out of place in a traditional school or even in an alternative school that also serves at-risk, younger students. A district may find that a high teen pregnancy rate intersects with the dropout rate. Some students of low socioeconomic status may need to work to support their families—and their work schedules may conflict significantly with school schedules. Or, two or three of these risk factors may apply to students who drop out. (For additional information about specific risk factors and related program strategies and options, see Chapter XII - Special Populations.)

   Determining the specific reasons students drop out can be a time-consuming and labor-intensive process. However, without specific information about the barriers that must be eliminated to ensure high school completion for all, it is less likely that a dropout recovery program will be effective. A "one size fits all" approach is simply not effective.

   A formal process for analyzing and defining the characteristics of the district's or school's dropout population should include the following steps/activities.

   A. Identify the types of data needed, including academic data (e.g., do students drop out because of academic failure, absenteeism/lack of credits, failure to pass TAKS, or multiple reasons?) and socioeconomic data (e.g., do students drop out because of the need to work, limited English proficiency, teen pregnancy/parenthood, substance abuse, migrancy, homelessness, incarceration, status in the foster care system, etc.?). Data must be isolated to include the population of students who have actually dropped out, and should include data from at least the two previous years.

   B. Create a plan that delineates sources for the data identified in step A, such as PEIMS, SASI, or data that will need to be gathered from other offices within

the district (e.g., the homeless education liaison) or from other agencies (e.g., Health & Human Services, Child Protective Services). Assign recovery staff responsible for gathering the data as well as any specific staff from other departments within the district/school or agencies outside the district or school.

C. Conduct interviews with students and their families to gain more in-depth information about why students dropped out. For example, if a student dropped out because of pregnancy, was she prevented from attending school because of lack of daycare? Were there self-esteem issues that compelled her to stay away from her home school? If a student dropped out because of homelessness, did the family move frequently within and across district boundaries, making it difficult to maintain a regular course load? Was the student an "unaccompanied youth," lacking the knowledge of his/her right to enroll in public school or the resources available to facilitate reenrollment?

D. Compile the data into a comprehensive report that identifies trends across the dropout population, creating "profiles" of students who have dropped out. To the extent possible, determine the percentage of dropouts who fit a particular category. Identify any additional issues raised during student and family interviews that may be relevant.

2. Based on the analysis of dropout factors, identify options that would eliminate as many of the key barriers to high school completion for as many students as possible. For example, if a large percentage of dropouts had enough credits to graduate but failed the TAKS, an intensive TAKS remediation program may be an important option for students. If limited English proficiency was a contributing factor to students' failure to pass TAKS, intensive literacy instruction coupled with TAKS preparation may be indicated.

If a large percentage of dropouts left school to work in order to support their families, classes offered in the early morning, evening, or weekends, or the opportunity for online credit recovery, may be indicated. If, however, the need to work is confounded by the challenges of living in a rural area (e.g., unreliable Internet connectivity or long distances to travel to and from school), correspondence or self-paced coursework may be a better option.

3. Clearly articulate all of the options available to students and emphasize the flexibility built into each option. Emphasize in outreach activities (see *Chapter VI – Identification and Tracking of Students Who Dropped Out*) the flexibility afforded to returning students and ensure that recovery staff as well as school administrative and instructional staff are fully aware of all the options available to students.

4. Review the process at least yearly. Populations change rapidly. Some program options that were particularly effective may cease to be as effective. Some options

that did not seem necessary may become more necessary. Recovery programs that have an accurate, current knowledge of their target population will be able to make minor and major changes in a "time is of the essence" manner and will continue to effectively serve the population.

Promising Strategies

Based primarily on information collected from the literature review, the following strategies have been particularly promising in providing a variety of program options.

Strategy 1: Offer intensive TAKS remediation for students who have all credits necessary for graduation but have failed all or a portion of the TAKS. (Example A)

Strategy 2: Offer accelerated credit recovery for students who are unlikely to attain all credits needed for graduation within a reasonable timeframe. (Examples A, B)

Strategy 3: Provide options for adults that are available outside the traditional school day. (Examples B, C, D)

Strategy 4: Create a rubric of available options and allow parents and students significant input into appropriate placement. (Example B)

Supporting Examples

Example A: *Mineola ISD*
            Tier 1 District, Small District (1,564 students)

Mineola ISD found that the majority of its dropouts were students who had all the credits necessary to graduate, but had failed all or a portion of the TAKS. The district has only one high school, so it has created an in-school learning center where students can pursue TAKS remediation, accelerated credit recovery, or both.

According to Mineola ISD recovery staff, the accelerated credit recovery program is inviting because it is informal and utilizes a small-group approach. It is not intimidating to the enrolled students. Students are more willing to ask for help.

Example B: *Lake Worth ISD*
            Tier 1 District, Small District (2,751 students)

Lake Worth ISD provides a variety of options for recovered students. There is an alternative high school that operates on an hour-to-hour basis, meaning that students can flex in and out as needed (e.g., to work). Lake Worth recently added an accelerated credit recovery program offering courses in English, mathematics, and some science. Students can use the credit recovery program alone, or attend part of the day in the traditional high school and part of the day in the credit recovery program, as needed. The district has also added a morning extended enrichment period (from 8:00 to 8:45 AM) in which students can do a computer-based credit recovery program in a lab setting. Finally, the district offers an evening (5:00 to 8:00 PM) adults-only program two nights a week that includes

Adult Basic Education (ABE), GED classes and ESL classes.

Lake Worth has developed rubrics to help counselors, parents, and students identify the most effective options for students. Options are based on both academic history and other reasons leading to the dropout event. Students and parents are very active in selecting the best option for the student, and this has helped motivate students to succeed in the path they have chosen.

Example C: Serving Older Youth Through a Comprehensive Out-of-School-Time System: Lessons from the AYPF Philadelphia Field Trip. American Youth Policy Forum, May 2006. http://www.aypf.org/tripreports/2006/TR052306

Philadelphia's approach incorporates two key programs—one focused on career and post-secondary preparation and one focused on serving over-age, under-credited youth. Philadelphia's The E^3 Power Centers offer intensive career preparation for out-of-school youth through four pathways: education, employment, occupational skills training, and life skills. The Education pathway includes GED preparation at different levels of instruction: individualized tutoring, test preparation, and links to external programs and support services. E^3also collaborates with community colleges, allowing students to earn credits towards an associate degree while still in high school. The Job Readiness Training shows students how to prepare a resume, interview for a job, and build a positive relationship with co-workers. The E^3 Power Centers pair students with employment specialists who match them with employers. Students can learn skills such as computer programming and maintenance or work with local businesses. Students choose from a range of life skills activities such a parenting.

Philadelphia's Career and Academic Development Institute is considered an exemplary accelerated high school targeted at over age dropouts with few credits. The school is operated by the Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America. The school offers year-round, non-traditional hours; assigns a case manager to each student; offers computer-assisted instruction and an online subscription to Internet lessons. Students who complete the program receive a high school diploma.

Example D: Multiple Pathways Research & Development: Summary Findings and Strategic Solutions for Overage, Under-Credited Youth. New York City Department of Education, October 2006. http://www.ytfg.org/documents/OMPGOverviewandFindingsBroadDistribution102206.pdf

New York City's Multiple Pathways project consists of four key programs:

Transfer High Schools are small, academic-based, and focus on students who have been enrolled in a New York City (NYC) public high school for at least one year and are far from being promoted on schedule in their current high school. These schools focus on personalized learning environments, rigorous academic standards, student-centered pedagogy, support to meet instructional and developmental goals, and on college

preparation. Over-age under-credited students have an average graduation rate of 56 percent from these schools, versus 19 percent for their peers in regular high schools. These schools nearly doubled attendance rates and credit accumulation for the group. All Transfer School students showed an increase in academic performance, with the most challenged students seeing the biggest increases.

Young Adult Borough Centers, housed within "host" high schools, are small learning groups that help students earn a diploma and create a post-graduation plan. They are full-time evening academic programs for students who have been in high school for at least four years and have attained a minimum of 17 credits. A non-traditional block schedule allows students to progress rapidly to earn only the credits they lack for graduation. Every Center has a community-based organization associated with it. The partner provides youth development support, career and college counseling, and job placement assistance. Students who complete the program receive a diploma from their high school of origin upon completion of credits and the Regents exams. The Young Adult Borough Center Model converts 44 percent of eligible students into high school graduates within one year.

New York City schools also offer full-time and part-time GED Programs, all of which also incorporate Learning to Work. The Access GED model is a full-time program for over-age under-credited youth that incorporates youth development, integrated thematic units, developmental portfolios, student engagement system, assessment, progression, and connections to post-secondary training and career exploration. The part-time model uses a research-based workshop instructional model with high-quality curriculum materials. The programs' part-time staff are routinely coached in research-based instructional strategies throughout the school year.

The Learning to Work Program focuses on high school completion and connection to work and post-secondary education. Services are provided by community-based organizations and are integrated into the above programs. The program focuses on employability skills development, subsidized internships, college and career counseling, and job placement. The program also implements attendance outreach, individual and group counseling, academic tutoring, and youth development strategies.

VIII.2 Offering A Flexible Schedule

Objective

To provide flexible scheduling options, including smaller daytime schedule blocks, twilight/evening classes, weekend classes, and summer school.

State of Practice

According to the Texas statewide survey, more than 80 percent of the districts and charter schools with dropout recovery programs and alternative high schools offer morning (84.3 percent) and afternoon (80.9 percent) classes. More than one-quarter also offer evening classes (26.1 percent) and e-classes (27.1 percent). Only a few (3.3 percent) offer classes on the weekend.

The classes offered in the alternative high school programs also come in a variety of blocks, ranging from 50-minute blocks to blocks of eight hours. Most commonly, they come in blocks of between four and five hours.

Most schools (86.3 percent) offer classes five days a week. Four percent of the districts and charter schools offer classes seven days a week. Nearly 80 percent of the programs also offer flexible schedules to accommodate recovered students' personal and family needs. More than 30 percent of the districts and charter schools offer classes year-round.

Promising National or Other State Practices

Programs must also offer flexible scheduling to help school fit into students' (typically complicated) lives. Such strategies may include self-paced curricula, shorter school "semesters" and breaks, early and late classes, and night and summer programming (Brush & Jones 2002; Woods 1995; Martin & Halperin 2006).

Several studies have also advocated the idea of providing ways for students to catch up on coursework or accumulate credits on a "fast track" (Steinberg & Almeida 2004, Hoye & Sturgis 2005, Aron 2006; Martin & Halperin 2006). Rather than require students to repeat entire semesters or grades—a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to some students—programs can create ways for students to work at their own pace and, through demonstrated proficiency, complete credits faster than they would in a regular school. This strategy is particularly critical in recovering dropouts who are "over-age and under-credited" (Hoye & Sturgis 2005, Chmelynski 2006).

Who Is Involved

Scheduling class blocks is an administrative function, typically performed at the district or school level. Determining scheduling options should include input from students so that the options are realistic and based on student needs (e.g., work and family obligations).

Process

The following steps are recommended for all districts and schools. However, the steps may be modified to best fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

1. Determine the scheduling barriers recovered dropouts may face. For example, are students homebound for some reason (e.g., teen parents)? Are students working, and if so, when are they typically available for learning (early morning, evening, weekends, summers)?
   - Survey students who have been recovered to determine their specific scheduling needs.
   - Hold focus groups or meetings with students who have dropped out and not yet been recovered, as well as parents, to determine what scheduling options would best meet their needs.

2. Based on the analysis of scheduling factors, identify options that would most likely result in increased attendance and course completion. For example, if the majority of students report that they would be able to attend evening classes, consider adding evening class sessions. If the majority of students are working at jobs that take them away for weeks at a time (e.g., oil rig workers), consider creating intensive class sessions during "off" weeks. If the majority of students are homebound, or if there is no consensus about acceptable schedules, consider providing laptops and online credit recovery and TAKS preparation software.

3. Clearly articulate all of the options available to students and emphasize the flexibility built into each option. Emphasize in outreach activities (see *Chapter VI - Identification and Tracking of Students Who Dropped Out*) the flexibility afforded to returning students and ensure that recovery staff as well as school administrative and instructional staff are fully aware of all the options available to students.

4. Review the process at least yearly. Populations change rapidly. Some program options that were particularly effective may cease to be as effective. Some options that did not seem necessary may become more necessary. Recovery programs that have an accurate, current knowledge of their target population will be able to make minor and major changes in a "time is of the essence" manner and will continue to effectively serve the population.

Promising Strategies

Based primarily on information collected from interviews with promising practice district and charter school staff, the following strategies have been particularly promising in providing flexible scheduling options.

Strategy 1: Offer smaller class blocks students can take in the morning or evening as needed to accommodate work schedules. (Examples A, B, C, D, E, G, H)

Strategy 2: Offer evening, weekend, and summer classes. (Examples A, B, C, E)

Strategy 3: Offer a completely self-paced curriculum, either through an in-school computer lab, an e-school, or correspondence courses. (Examples D, E, F, I)

Supporting Examples

Example A: *Presidio ISD*
                 Tier 1 District, Small District (1,451 students)

Recovered students in Presidio ISD attend the alternative academic high school. The school has a flexible schedule with two strands: 8:00-12:00 and 12:00-4:00. This gives students who work the flexibility to continue working as well as attend school.

Recovered students who failed the TAKS but have all credits necessary to graduate come to the school for tutoring in the afternoon, after school or on weekends. The school also has a 4:00-6:00 credit recovery session for high at-risk students that attend the regular high school during the day. Between 20 and 30 students participate in the credit recovery program. The Saturday session is for students who missed school.

Example B: *Socorro ISD*
                 Tier 3 District, Large District (38,357 students)

Socorro ISD's Options High School (the district's alternative campus) offers four schedules: 8:00 AM-3:55 PM, 4:00-8:00 PM, 4:00-6:00 PM, and 6:00-8:00 PM. Each of the schedules is targeted to meet the needs of a different group of students. For example, the 8:00 AM to 3:55 PM schedule is for students who both lack credits and need TAKS remediation (these students need "everything"). The 4:00-8:00 PM session is for students who cannot attend during the day because of work or family responsibilities. The 4:00-6:00 PM and 6:00-8:00 PM sessions are for regular high school students who miss some credits. They attend this session to recover credits. These schedules were designed in response to student needs and with the goal of maximizing capacity given the limited space the school currently has.

Example C: *Deer Park ISD*
                 Tier 1 District, Medium District (12,421 students)

Deer Park offers accelerated core classes for students who have dropped out, using a "packet-driven" curriculum. The district also offers a self-paced computerized program. Students with jobs can qualify for flex schedules if they meet certain criteria. Recovery staff consider this practice very effective because students can maintain their income and still work toward graduating.

Example D: *One Stop Multiservice Charter*
Tier 1 School (1,140 students)

The One Stop Multiservice Charter Schools are open twelve hours a day, five days a week. The schools offer a two-, four- or six-hour instructional day, which is customized according to student needs. For example, if a student is only lacking a passing score on TAKS to graduate, he/she might be "flexed in" for two or four periods instead of the normal day of six periods. If a student is working, he/she can attend evening classes.

According to recovery staff, this kind of flexibility is important because students do not feel that they are "wasting their time" when they could be working or spending their time somewhere else. In addition, students know that they can graduate at any day or hour of the year during the nine-month period and do not have to wait until the end of the traditional school year to determine if they can graduate. Thus, they are more likely to attend school daily and are encouraged and motivated to complete the program.

Example E: *Katy ISD*
Tier 3 District, Large District (51,201 students)

Katy ISD offers an alternative "school of choice" for 10th through 12th grade students. The alternative high school originally used a split schedule (students could attend in the morning, in the afternoon, or all day). According to recovery staff, this schedule was ineffective because students were not progressing as quickly as they needed to. Now the school operates on a full-day schedule in which students attend longer school days but over a shorter period of time. In addition, Katy ISD has added night school as an option.

The alternative high school and all other high schools in the district also have computer labs where students can recover credits. This is the most common option for recovered dropouts because there are hundreds of seats available on each campus (whereas the alternative high school is currently limited to 130 students). According to recovery staff, in 2006-2007, 270 students recovered nearly 400 credits.

Example F: *Bangs ISD*
Recommended District, Small District (1,136 students)

Bangs ISD offers several options depending on students' scheduling needs. The ACE program is essentially a correspondence course where students receive instructional packets and communicate with an instructor to complete coursework. This option tends to work best for students who are very close to graduating, but for whatever reason cannot continue to attend the regular high school.

In some cases, students have only one or two days a week, or even one or two weeks available to continue their studies (e.g., if they have moved out of the district or even out of state and return to visit within the district), they can take a GED pretest. If they score high enough, they are offered an intensive review course led by an instructor, then take the GED. Recovery staff notes that this pathway is particularly effective if a student is far

from having enough credits to graduate, but wants ultimately to attend college or a technical school.

Example G: Galveston ISD
*   Recommended District, Small District (8,430 students)*

According to dropout recovery staff, the district's large high school was not an appropriate location for students who were being pulled back into the system. Five years ago, the district started AIM High School for credit accrual and recovery. Students are physically separated from the regular high school. The program is structured much like a regular high school, but is more flexible to meet student needs.

AIM High School is small, with six classrooms and a small cafeteria; one administrator, one counselor, one secretary, and six teachers (dedicated, and full time). Recovery staff consider the environment nurturing because students have so many obstacles outside of school that keep them from being successful.

Example H: Georgetown ISD
*   Recommended District, Small District (9,508 students)*

A typical school day at Georgetown's alternative program, Chip Richarte High School, enables students to select one of two sessions based on students' work schedules. Students must attend class four hours a day (8:30-1:15 or 11:30-4:20). Sessions overlap to allow for lunchtime, social time, time to meet with advisors and counselors (there are 11 advisors), and other structured activities. Some students may attend classes the whole day to catch up on credits or to finish more quickly.

Example I: Bay Area Charter School
*   Tier 1 School (92 students)*

Credit recovery is self-paced. Students can only take one credit recovery course at a time. This helps them complete the course within a specific time period. Students do credit recovery for one hour after school. If they meet this requirement, then they can also access the online course from home. The school discourages students from taking more than one credit recovery course at a time because experience has shown that if students take more than one course they have difficulty in completing the courses on time.

IX. Academic Supports

IX.1 High Academic Standards

Objective

To set, communicate and implement high academic standards for recovered students.

State of Practice

According to the statewide survey, 53.5 percent of districts and charter schools reported setting high academic standards for recovered dropouts. Yet, few district and school staff interviewed were able to articulate their expectations from these students. Still, fewer made students, parents, teachers, and other school and district staff aware of the academic expectations.

Promising National or Other State Practices

Teachers and staff need to have the same high expectations of recovered dropouts and at-risk students as they have of other high school students. While formal tracking may be a thing of the past, holding at-risk students to a lower standard than other students is a de facto "push out" strategy that does nothing to improve their chances of educational achievement or their feelings of self worth (Brush & Jones 2002; Steinberg & Almeida 2004; Woods 1995; Aron 2006; Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morrison 2006). Apart from holding students to high academic standards, many programs reported setting attendance requirements, discipline policies, and other requirements. These requirements are emphasized through positive reinforcement rather than punitive actions (Chmelynski 2006, Lehr et al 2004, Brush & Jones 2002).

Who Is Involved

Setting high academic standards is a means of communicating to all stakeholders the belief that every student can succeed in graduating from high school. Academic standards may incorporate standards of behavior that tend to influence academic success—such as behavioral and attendance standards. Setting and communicating standards demonstrates to students and their parents that school and district staff believe that these students are capable of succeeding. It is also important to formalize a process by which success is measured. District and school administrative and instructional staff should work together to articulate a set of standards and a process by which the standards will be measured. School staff, including the principal, teachers, and counselors, should continually emphasize these standards to students in their daily interactions.

Process

The following steps are recommended for all districts and schools. However, the steps may be modified to best fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

1. Set academic standards that reflect:
   - The expectation that all students will graduate under the Recommended High

School Program.
- The expectation that all students will maintain a certain grade point average (GPA) or letter grade average.
- The expectation that all students will maintain a specified attendance rate.
- The expectation that all students will maintain a specified disciplinary standard.

2. Formalize the standards by, for instance, developing a mission statement.

3. Make sure all school and district staff members are aware of the standards and emphasize the standards in their daily communication with students and parents.

4. Publicize the standards, by, for instance, creating a display or banner prominently displayed in the school.

5. Incorporate the standards into the readmission process by requiring students and parents to sign a contract or application acknowledging that they understand and agree to adhere to the standards.

6. Create a formal tracking method to frequently identify students meeting, exceeding, or falling behind with respect to the standards. Reward students who meet or exceed the standards and remediate students who are falling behind.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and schools reporting "promising practice" in this area, the following strategies have been particularly promising in setting and communicating high expectations for students.

Strategy 1: Articulate high expectations in the form of a mission statement and prominently display the mission statement in the school. (Examples A, C, E)

Strategy 2: Incorporate high expectations in application/readmission contracts. (Examples C, D)

Strategy 3: Create a formal tracking system to ensure students are on course with respect to meeting or exceeding the standards. (Example B)

Strategy 4: Emphasize the need for students to graduate under the Recommended High School Program. (Example D)

Strategy 5: Involve students directly in tracking progress toward graduation. (Examples C, F)

Supporting Examples

Example A: *Raul Yzaguirre School for Success*
                     Recommended School (650 students)

The school atmosphere is extremely positive and focuses on success for every student. Students start each school day knowing their instructors have only the highest possible level of achievement in mind for each of them. The expectation stated upon entering the main school building is that no student will fail; the school is geared for every student to be successful and graduate with a diploma. The school has a 92.3 percent graduation rate, higher than the state's graduation rate of 80.4 percent and their respective region's rate of 79.1 percent.

Example B: *Amarillo ISD*
                     Recommended District, Large District (30,206 students)

North Heights Alternative School uses a point system to track student progress toward reaching their academic goals. Students earn points for attendance and class completion and lose points for tardiness, absenteeism, or discipline issues. Every Thursday, North Heights staff reviews the status of each student's points. Students with a high number of points are rewarded with schoolwide recognition and gift cards. Students that are very low on points meet with staff to discuss the reasons they are low. Students that reach zero points or lower are removed from school for two weeks.

Example C: *Presidio ISD*
                     Tier 1 District, Small District (1,451 students)

The staff of Presidio's alternative high school look at the students as "diamonds in the rough;" emphasizing their potential for success. The staff communicates to the students that everyone should pursue education beyond high school. The school sets high goals for the students. The campus mission statement is that everyone can succeed.

Example D: *Socorro ISD*
                     Tier 3 District, Large District (38,357 students)

Socorro ISD's intake process defines the school's expectations. Students are told very specifically what is expected of them. High expectations are embedded in the program. Students are expected to graduate under the Recommended High School Program. The high expectations are evident in the passing scores students need to get. For example, students have to score 80 on average on an accelerated instruction module before they can move to the next module. Teachers emphasize the high expectations in the classroom. Teachers tell students that they expect them to go to college. The school brings in representatives from different technical schools and colleges to talk about getting to and succeeding in college.

Example E: *Bay Area Charter School*
              Tier 1 School (92 students)

The superintendent writes messages on every progress report urging students to pass each course with the highest grade possible. She encourages high performance by publicizing in the student newspaper the list of students with high grades. The Student Handbook has a statement on academic expectations. Success is equated with earning credits. Students have to maintain a C average. The school's motto is: "If you are not successful, we are not successful." Students keep track of their own grades. They have a spreadsheet where they record their grades; so they are always aware of their academic performance.

Example F: *Coleman ISD*
              Tier 1 District, Small District (996 students)

Recovered students in Coleman ISD are required to develop their own personal graduation plans (with the assistance of school staff). Recovery staff believe that if a school develops and hands a plan to a student, and the student fails, then the student can always blame the school. If a student develops his/her own plan, there is no one to blame for failure but himself/herself. This motivates students to stick with their plans.

IX.2 Individualized Learning

Objective

To provide individualized learning pathways that address students' specific academic deficiencies, validate their autonomy, and get them to graduate as quickly and efficiently as possible.

State of Practice

The majority of the instructional programs in which recovered students participate offer individualization, flexibility, and self-paced progress. According to the statewide survey, nearly 70 percent of the dropout recovery programs develop individualized achievement or education plans for the recovered students. More than 90 percent of the instructional programs provided to recovered students use instructional technology in the form of self-paced computer-based curriculum. These computer-based programs and a low student-teacher ratio (86.0 percent) allow for individualized instruction (78.9 percent).

Promising National or Other State Practices

As important as what is taught is *how* it is taught. Effective programs tended to feature student-centered inquiry and instruction as opposed to teacher lectures or passive methods of learning (Woods 1995, Stern 1986). Some programs use journaling as a way to move students from "passive victim" to "responsible party" in their school experiences (Stern 1986).

Who Is Involved

Developing an individualized academic program requires input from academic staff, counseling staff, administrative staff, the student, and the parent (or a significant person in the student's life, such as a friend, a relative, or even a probation officer).

Process

The following steps are recommended for all districts and schools. However, the steps may be modified to best fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

1. Upon re-enrollment, identify specific academic barriers to graduation, such as TAKS failure or lack of credits.

2. Identify student's time constraints that may impact ability to graduate, such as:
   - Can the student attend school everyday?
   - Can the student attend two, four or six hours a day?
   - Can the student attend tutorials, acceleration before or after school or on Saturdays?
   - Review options for the student.
   - Discuss college/work force connection of the academic plan and the student's long-term goal/dream. This is an opportunity to connect to coherent career pathways or course sequences.

3. Develop an individualized academic plan that will address:
   - Academic status upon re-entry;
   - Credits needed and schedule for completion of credits (through regular class work, cross-disciplinary projects, and credit recovery);
   - TAKS deficiencies and plan for remediation (e.g., through special tutorials, online TAKS remediation and practice materials).

4. Identify a specific staff member (instructional or counseling, for example) responsible for closely monitoring the student's individualized academic plan and adjusting it, as necessary.

5. Formally review students' academic progress with instructional and administrative staff, parents, and student.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and schools reporting "promising practice" in this area, the following strategies have been particularly promising in implementing individualized academic plans for students.

Strategy 1: Determine specific academic barriers to graduation using longitudinal data: lack of credits versus TAKS failure. (Examples A, B, C, D)

Strategy 2: Enable students to accrue credits on an accelerated basis, e.g., through online accelerated credit recovery programs, multidisciplinary projects, or self-paced coursework. (Examples A, B, D)

Strategy 3: Provide opportunities for focused TAKS remediation, e.g., through before-, during-, or after-school tutorials/study sessions or online TAKS remediation programs. (Examples B, C, D)

Strategy 4: Enable students to "double up" on credits through cross-disciplinary projects. (Examples E, F)

Strategy 5: Identify students' specific learning styles and tailor instruction accordingly. (Example C)

Supporting Examples

Example A: *Presidio ISD*
Tier 1 District, Small District (1,451 students)

Students who enroll in the alternative academic high school have their academic record reviewed and an education plan is developed for them. The plan takes into account the student's goals; that is, whether the student plans to work, go to a technical school or attend college. The program gives priority to students who are one or two years behind in credit. Accelerated credit recovery is provided all day.

Example B: *Bay Area Charter School*
              Tier 1 School (92 students)

Each student has a graduation plan that is developed upon enrollment. The plan lists all the courses that are required; shows how many credits the student has; how many he/she needs to graduate; and what he/she needs to take within the time specified for his/her stay at the school. Each school day starts with a one-hour review of TAKS (8:00-9:00). Then students go to regular 55-minute classes by content area (9:00-3:00). Between 3:00 and 4:00 students attend a credit recovery program. If students do well on TAKS, then instead of the TAKS review between 8:00 and 9:00, they can work on a core course.

Credit recovery is self-paced. Students can only take one credit recovery course at a time. This helps them complete the course within a specific time period. Students do credit recovery for one hour after school. If they meet this requirement, then they can also access the online course from home. The school discourages students from taking more than one credit recovery course at a time because experience has shown that if students take more than one course they have difficulty completing the courses on time.

Example C: *Sherman ISD*
              Tier 1 District, Small District (6,424 students)

Upon enrollment, each student must take a reading and math test and a learning styles test. The staff use the results of the tests to place the student and see what the student needs. Each class has a syllabus and objectives. Students can master the objectives based on their preferred learning style. Student may create learning strategies for themselves. In staff meetings, teachers share information on the learning strategies. One of the teachers is an instructional specialist (aka, learning styles guru) and she helps students who struggle or experience academic difficulties. She suggests the best strategies for the student. The teachers serve as facilitators. Instruction is individualized and self-paced. Students use a computer-based instructional program and video streaming. Only in the TAKS Lab does the teacher stand in front of the class and lectures.

Example D: *Socorro ISD*
              Tier 3 District, Large District (38,357 students)

To enroll in Options High School students have to be at least 16 years of age and behind in credit. The school does not have a minimum credit requirement. Students are expected to complete three credits in a semester. On Monday and Friday classes focus on credit recovery and students use an accelerated instruction program for self-paced study. On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, the classes deal with TAKS objectives.

Example E: Amarillo ISD
            Recommended District, Large District (30,206 students)

One strategy North Heights Alternative School uses to accelerate credits is to have teachers develop cross-disciplinary projects. This way, students can earn credit in two courses simultaneously. This also promotes collaboration among teachers and results in high-interest projects.

Example F: Austin ISD
            Recommended District, Large District (81,917 students)

Gonzalo Garza Independent High School offers multi-credit courses in the summer. These courses allow students to earn more credits and enable some students to graduate from high school in three years. These courses combine rigor with fun. For example, *Crime Scene Investigation (CSI)* is a 4-credit course. Students get credit in chemistry, government, Business Computers Information Systems (BCIS) and criminal justice. The school partners with the Austin Police Department and forensic lab scientists, the Texas Rangers and the Department of Public Safety. The chemistry part is taught in a forensic lab at the Fire Academy. A federal judge opened the courtroom for the students when students had to prepare a PowerPoint presentation on the three branches of government. These courses also require students to dress appropriately and behave well. The course incorporates TEKS from these different subject areas.

The *Garza's Gardens* course is a 4.5 credit rigorous Career and Technical Education course that has been taught for nine years and gives credits in economics and government and agriculture science. It involves 40 to 60 hours of community service. Garza Independent High School offers this course with the University of Texas civic action program Speak up/Speak out.

IX.3   Small Learning Groups

Objective

To limit class size and create small learning groups.

State of Practice

The majority of districts and charter schools responding to the statewide survey (86.0 percent) indicated that they use low student-to-teacher ratios in classes for recovered students.

Promising National or Other State Practices

Creating small learning environments—either within or outside of a regular school—and maintaining low student-to-teacher ratios are strategies frequently cited in exemplary programs (Steinberg & Almeida 2004; Woods 1995; Aron 2006, Lee & Burkam 2003; Lehr et al 2004; Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morrison 2006; Martin & Halperin 2006).

Who Is Involved

District and school administrative staff members who are responsible for making staffing allocations that result in a low student-to-teacher ratio.

Process

The following steps are recommended for all districts and schools. However, the steps may be modified to best fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

A school's ability to implement a small learning group approach is largely dependent on the capacity of the school and the number of staff available. Following are some options for reducing class size for recovered students.

1. Implement flexible scheduling (See *Offering a Flexible Schedule* in *Chapter VIII*). By adjusting the school day to accommodate multiple class "sessions" so that each session can be attended by fewer students. For example, consider offering a slate of classes in the morning and afternoon on a rotating basis.

2. Schedule "Academic Counseling" periods throughout the week so that they are attended by a few students at a time. This enables students to "bond" with a single academic advisor and to establish a small peer group within the larger school.

3. Consider grouping students based on their specific academic needs. For example, group students who have failed the same portion of the TAKS so that instruction can be finely focused on specific areas of deficiency.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and schools reporting "promising practice" in this area, the following strategies have been

particularly promising in implementing small learning groups.

Strategy 1: Maintain a student-to-teacher ratio significantly lower than the ratio in traditional classrooms. (Examples A, B, C, D)

Strategy 2: Group students according to specific academic needs. (Example D)

Supporting Examples

Example A: Socorro ISD
          Tier 3 District, Large District (38,357 students)

In Socorro's alternative high school, math and science classes have approximately 10 students and social studies classes have around 15 students.

Example B: Manor ISD
          Tier 1 District, Small District (5,098 students)

Manor's Excel High School tries to maintain as low a student-to-teacher ratio as possible. The school principal believes that small classes help students feel a closer connection to the school: they feel a much closer connection if they are one of five or six students in a particular class, as opposed to one of 25 students.

Example C: Lake Worth ISD
          Tier 1 District, Small District (2,751 students)

Lake Worth ISD considers their low student-to-teacher ratio (typically 10-15:1) a key factor contributing to student success. The small groups make students feel important—they do not feel "lost" within a large group of students. The entire staff checks on students and asks the students how they are doing.

Example D: Bosqueville ISD
          Tier 1 District, Small District (480 students)

Bosqueville ISD has established "TAKS Homerooms" for students who need TAKS help. The Homerooms are small—around six or seven students each—and are arranged by subject area so that all the students in the homeroom have the same academic focus.

X.   Career and Technical Education Supports

Objective

To help recovered dropouts identify short- and long-term career goals and to assist them in achieving those goals while staying in school and graduating.

State of Practice

About 64 percent of the programs serving recovered dropouts offer a generic vocational component as part of their program. They offer most typically generic job skills training (85.3 percent) and employability skills training (52.3 percent) such as how to prepare a resume, find a job, and do a job interview. More than one-third of these programs collaborate with local businesses and industry or involve students in community service work projects. However, only 11.5 percent of these programs offer paid jobs for the students while they are in school and 12.0 percent offer job placement services. Fewer than three percent of these programs offer training in a specific occupation.

Promising National or Other State Practices

Traditionally, alternative education programs have focused on GED preparation and vocational training. Some researchers argue that these approaches, alone, are ineffective (Steinberg & Almeida 2004, Woods 1995). A study of GED preparation programs in the Austin Independent School District, determined that GED preparation alone was not an acceptable alternative to high school graduation. The district contracted with two GED preparation organizations to offer services primarily to minority students living in neighborhoods where 80 percent of adults over the age of 25 have no GED or high school diploma. In both GED Programs, more than 46 percent dropped out of the program and only between 13.6 and 29.3 percent received a GED (Wilkinson 1994).

Research has shown that effective career/vocational preparation programs focus on long-term goals and developing skills that will allow students to participate meaningfully in the business economy. This may include the development of "life plans" that incorporate both educational and career-related goals. Many programs also employ career specialists to assist with career and job-related issues (Chmelynski 2006).

Another promising strategy is to engage local businesses in defining critical workforce skills and setting appropriate proficiency levels (Hoye & Sturgis 2005; Almeida, Johnson & Steinberg 2006, Harris 2006). This approach ensures that career preparation program components address both short-term and long-term career goals and needs. One report specifically challenged business leaders to develop "industry pipelines" that clearly delineate knowledge and skills needed to advance at each level of job within a particular industry (PYN 2006).

Some programs have focused on methodically transitioning students from unpaid internships to gradually more advanced levels of work. For example, dropout recovery programs in Boston, Massachusetts and Pima, Arizona used a tiered model where students gradually moved from basic employability training with short-term community

service projects, to paid community internships, to coached private or public sector paid work, and finally to long-term private-sector employment or employment training programs (Harris 2006). Other programs require a one-to-one correspondence between academic and work credits in order for work credits to "count" (Stern 1986).

Who Is Involved

Short- and long-term career planning is particularly important for recovered dropouts. In many cases, the student dropped out because of financial reasons. Thus, demonstrating to the student that she/he can stay in school *and* hold a job *and* progress along a career path is critical. This process requires comprehensive effort on the part of:

- Recovery staff, who can identify collaborative partners;
- School staff, including the individual graduation plan (IPG) coordinator/advocate, who may provide job readiness/job skill instruction and supervise work-study programs;
- Local businesses, who may provide paid or unpaid work opportunities or mentor students along a career path;
- Students, who must articulate their short- and long-term career goals and commit to specific activities designed to reach those goals.

Process

The following steps are recommended for all districts and schools. However, the steps may be modified to best fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

1. As a school/district, create paid and unpaid work opportunities.

    A. Identify major employers in the area and contact Human Resources departments to discuss possible paid and unpaid opportunities for students. Collaboratively create "job descriptions" for available positions describing, for example:
       - Hours per week/time of day opportunity is available;
       - Duration of opportunity;
       - Duties associated with each job;
       - Job skills needed to meet job requirements;
       - Technical skills needed to meet job requirements;

    B. Outline a system of monitoring/review that includes both employer staff and school/district staff and specifies how and how frequently students will be evaluated.

2. Identify local community colleges and technical programs that may be available to students.

    A. Work with college/technical program staff to identify:
       - Flexibility of class schedule;
       - Description of program;

- Basic/Technical skills needed to enter and exit program;
- Resulting degree, certificate, or other certification and job opportunities available for trained workers.

    B. Outline a system of monitoring/review that includes both college/program staff and school/district staff and specifies how and how frequently students will be evaluated.

3. Create a system of resources to identify students' work interests, experiences, aptitudes, and skills.

    A. Use existing or develop interest and aptitude inventories to identify student work/career interests and aptitudes.

    B. Provide business/community mentors or job coaches to help students explore the requirements of and preparation needed for various career opportunities.

    C. Work with local employers to provide opportunities to students to visit work places or job shadow to experience different careers.

4. Incorporate Career and Technical Education into class work across subject areas, for example:
- Incorporate real-world applications of mathematics (such as in a retail setting, for drafting, etc.) into mathematics class work;
- Incorporate business writing (e.g., resume and cover-letter writing; memoranda; email; reports) into English language arts class work.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and schools reporting "promising practice" in this area, the following strategies have been particularly promising in providing vocational and career support to students.

Strategy 1: Provide job readiness skill instruction. (Example A)

Strategy 2: Utilize a co-op program that places students in various jobs and monitors their performance. (Examples A, B, C, E, G)

Strategy 3: Work with local community colleges and technical schools to provide dual-credit or technical certification opportunities. (Examples B, C, D, G)

Strategy 4: Assist students in developing short- and long-term career plans and in identifying the short- and long-term goals they will need to accomplish. (Examples F, J)

Strategy 5: Work with local Workforce Councils to provide additional career/technical education opportunities. (Examples C, H, I)

Supporting Examples

Example A: *Socorro ISD*
                      Tier 3 District, Large District (38,357 students)

Socorro ISD's Options High School offers a Business Computers Information Systems (BCIS) class and has a co-op teacher. The co-op class, which meets for one hour a day, serves 20 students. The class addresses how to prepare a resume, how to look for a job, and how to interview for a job. The co-op teacher coordinates with local employers and monitors the students on their job sites. Students work either in district offices or in the community.

Example B: *Sherman ISD*
                      Tier 1 District, Small District (6,424 students)

Students in Sherman ISD can attend Grayson County Community College to take vocational courses. In addition, the district's alternative school offers a Diversified Career Prep course that allows students to work and get credit. The teacher visits the students at the work site and grades their performance. The teacher contacts businesses to get jobs for students. Employers are invited to Friday Recognition events to share positive information about the student(s) working for them.

Example C: *Morton ISD*
                      Tier 1 District, Small District (508 students)

Morton ISD staff work closely with local businesses and colleges located in close proximity. The district has work programs, in which students attend school for half the day and work for half the day. In addition, the district offers technical preparation in business skills, welding, agriculture, family and consumer science, and metal fabrication. Local colleges provide courses that result in student certification in professions such as nurse's aides, phlebotomists, etc. The high school works through Upward Bound in partnership with South Plains College and the Texas Workforce Council to get students into college or to set up a work-based program so students can earn work credits while they attend school.

Example D: *Willis ISD*
                      Tier 1 District, Small District (5,666 students)

Willis ISD offers a Career and Technical Education (CTE) Program in which students learn basic job skills and the teacher helps students apply for jobs. The district also works closely with Montgomery Community College, where students learn skills in professions such as nursing, welding, etc. The district provides transportation for students to these community college classes.

Example E: *Deer Park ISD*
                 Tier 1 District, Medium District (12,421 students)

Deer Park ISD works closely with local businesses to provide jobs for students in exchange for credits. Deer Park ISD staff keep in very close contact with employers, and according to recovery staff, "Our businesses don't hesitate to contact us whenever they are not satisfied with our students." The students are monitored daily. Staff use an application/job requirements form to monitor student progress.

Example F: *One Stop Multiservice Charter*
                 Tier 1 School (1,140 students)

One Stop Multiservice Charter School operates a Career Pathways Program called Kids Opportunity. The student is required to fill out a questionnaire describing his/her vocational interests for the future. Then, the student completes a short and long term career plan.

In addition, One Stop Multiservice Charter School has a mentoring program using local business leaders. The mentor fills out a questionnaire to determine the type of student they would like to work with based on interests. School staff use the survey to pair students in the vocational program with business people.

Example G: *La Joya ISD*
                 Recommended District, Medium District (25,007 students)

La Joya ISD partnered with Workforce Solutions, receiving a two-year grant. Workforce Solutions provided training materials focusing on at-risk and recovered students' academic needs, and placed them in training programs based on their career areas of interest, as well as providing jobs. Students were paid for both training and work. District staff indicated that paying students to attend the training and for work was a major incentive, as most of the district's dropouts left school for economic reasons.

Example H: *Grand Prairie ISD*
                 Recommended District, Medium District (25,000 students)

Grand Prairie's dropout recovery fair brings together a variety of resources available to students who have not earned a high school diploma. These resources include options for earning a high school diploma, for further schooling, GED and career opportunities. Representatives from the Texas Workforce Commission participate in the fair.

Example I: *Presidio ISD*
                 Tier 1 District, Small District (1,451 students)

Workforce Solutions Upper Rio Grande is one of 28 workforce development boards in Texas. The district works with Workforce Solutions to provide vocational training in occupations such as nursing, security officer, and welder. In addition, the organization

provides GED preparation. Workforce Solutions has an office on the campus.

Example J: Austin ISD
                   Recommended District, Large District (81,917 students)

Austin ISD's Gonzalo Garza Independent High School employs a school-to-career specialist who provides job-search assistance and arranges college visits, internships, job shadowing, career field trips, and company tours. The school gives workshops on college preparation, life skills, and financial aid, and helps students access online job listings and find employment.

XI.   Social Supports

Objective

To reduce or eliminate the socioeconomic barriers that tend to prevent dropouts from succeeding in school.

State of Practice

Dropout recovery programs offer students a wide range of social support services. Most typically, according to the statewide survey, these programs offer counseling (78.6 percent). The programs in more than 40 percent of the districts and charter schools also offer low-cost meals. A smaller percentage of the programs offer day care (29.1 percent) and bus fare (19.4 percent). Fewer than 10 percent of the programs offer drug rehabilitation (7.0 percent), alcohol rehabilitation (6.0 percent), and help with housing (3.7 percent).

Promising National or Other State Practices

While schools certainly cannot hope to solve every societal and familial factor that leads students to drop out, there are some key strategies that can be implemented at the program level to mitigate these problems. These include:

- Helping students develop a life or career plan ((Brush & Jones 2002). This strategy may include helping students envision a positive future for themselves (Woods 1995) and developing a realistic, attainable set of goals with smaller intermediary objectives they can attain (PYN 2006).

- Helping students access a variety of social services, such as healthcare, childcare Medicaid, food stamps, housing, and legal aid, recognizing that academic issues are not the sole reasons students drop out (Chmelynski 2006, Woods 1995, Knepper 1988, Aron 2006, Lehr et al 2004, Martin & Halperin 2006).

- Providing coaching and mentoring assistance to students. Most programs recognize that a key factor in program success is making students feel that some adult cares about their academic and personal success. Many programs focus on grooming parents as mentors (Steinberg & Almeida 2004; Hoye & Sturgis 2005; Woods 1995; Lehr et al 2004; Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morrison 2006). Specifically, these programs teach parents how to talk with their children about school and show that they care about their children's progress, be proactive in seeking help for their children if they exhibit dropout risk factors, reach out to all at-risk children in the community, learn more about what programs are available and how to access them, and emphasize the importance of dropout recovery programs to elected officials (PYN 2006). Of note, strong parental involvement may be particularly effective in motivating Latino dropouts to return to school (Fashola & Slavin 1997). However, when parents are not able to provide the social and academic support at-risk students need, adult mentors should be available to students as part of their recovery "service package." These mentors

may fill a variety of functions, including acting as advocates to get needed services for students, helping to create individual learning plans, and facilitating group counseling (Hoye & Sturgis 2005, Chmelynski 2006, Woods 1995).

Who Is Involved

District and school staff should work together to identify social supports needed by their specific population of dropouts (see *Case Management Approach* in *Chapter VII.1*). Based on the social support needs identified by school staff, staff from the various social agencies described below, and any other appropriate agencies, should be identified and recruited to work collaboratively with school staff to meet social service needs. Examples of agencies include Health & Human Services, Child Protective Services, County Youth Services, Communities In Schools, Big Brothers Big Sisters, etc. Both the student and his/her relevant support network (parents, relatives, caseworkers, etc.) should be involved throughout the process of identifying, providing, and following up on needed services.

Process

The following steps are recommended for all districts and schools. However, the steps may be modified to best fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

1. Identify the socioeconomic factors that most directly impact the dropouts in your school or district. (See *Tailoring Program Options to Student Needs* in *Chapter VIII.1* for additional information on creating profiles of dropouts to isolate socioeconomic factors).

2. For each factor, develop specific strategies for reducing or eliminating barriers, both through existing resources and through additional resources. Determine who will be responsible for implementing the strategies:
   - Identify supports that can be provided at the school level, for example, through existing counselors.
   - Identify supports that can be provided at the district level, for example, through coordination with homeless education liaisons, migrant education personnel, transportation services, etc.
   - Identify supports that can be provided through other municipal agencies or organizations, such as Health & Human Services, Drug/Gang/Teen Pregnancy Task Forces, etc. (See *Cross-System Collaboration* in *Chapter V.1* for more information on developing and sustaining partnerships with other municipal agencies/organizations).
   - Identify supports that can be provided through local organizations and entities, such as homeless shelters, battered women's shelters, drug and alcohol treatment centers, churches, relief organizations. (See *Other Collaborative Partners* in *Chapter V.3* for more information on developing and sustaining partnerships with other organizations.)

3. Create a focused list of social supports provided by the school, district, and other agencies and disseminate it through various agencies and schools.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and schools reporting "promising practice" in this area, the following strategies have been particularly promising in providing additional social supports to students.

Strategy 1: Provide training/coaching in life skills and character development. (Examples A, C, F, G, H)

Strategy 2: Use guest speakers from outside organizations to counsel students on issues such as substance abuse. (Example A)

Strategy 3: Coordinate with the local food bank to provide meals for students attending school outside of traditional hours. (Example B)

Strategy 4: Assist students in developing short- and long-term career/life plans and in identifying the short- and long-term goals they will need to accomplish. (Example E)

Strategy 5: Connect students with a caring adult through a formal or informal mentoring program. (Examples A, E, F, G, H)

Strategy 6: Provide daycare and parenting classes for teen parents. (Examples C, D, F, G, H, I, J)

Strategy 7: Offer community service organizations (e.g., homeless assistance office) space on campus. (Examples I, J)

Strategy 8: Have school counseling staff provide individualized assistance with specific issues such as physical abuse, substance abuse, psychological problems, etc., and offer referrals to outside agencies. (Examples D, H)

Supporting Examples

Example A: *Bay Area Charter School*
                         Tier 1 School (92 students)

Bay Area Charter provides students with a 30-minute advisory period every day. During the advisory period this year, students reviewed three programs (one program per term): (1) Seven Effective Habits of Successful Students; (2) Strategies for Study Skills; and (3) How You Get a Job and Keep a Job. The school also provides an anger management class and students are active in a campus organization – Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD). They collect food for families for Thanksgiving; provide gifts for children in the battered women's center, etc. In addition, the school invites a drug counselor to visit the school once a week to discuss with students the consequences of bad decisions. The school also provides teen parenting classes.

Upon enrollment, a student is assigned a mentor who stays with the student until graduation. The school considers this relationship a cornerstone of its program. Mentors

work closely with students to ensure they graduate. Mentors assist students in filling out college applications and applying for financial aid. The school asks students when they graduate to keep in touch with their mentor and inform the mentor what they are doing. Most students do so. The school tracks students all through the first year of college or employment. During the first year in college, Bay Area Charter offers tutorial help to students. After the first year, fewer students stay in touch because " they need us less."

Example B: *Mineola ISD*
                 Tier 1 District, Small District (1,564 students)

Mineola ISD partners with the Food Bank in the summer to provide breakfast and lunch for students attending summer programs.

Example C: *Sherman ISD*
                 Tier 1 District, Small District (6,424 students)

Sherman ISD's alternative learning center offers character education. The center brings in a known speaker and uses his video. Each student is required to watch the video. During the Friday Recognition event, one student has to talk about a character issue. Once a month, students watch a character education video. Students also have to complete an advisory packet dealing with decision-making. Students have to describe in writing how they would deal with specific situations. Their teacher reviews the essay and responds.

The school also runs a bus service for teen parents and their babies to the daycare center on campus.

Example D: *Deer Park ISD*
                 Tier 1 District, Medium District (12,421 students)

Deer Park ISD operates an Early Childhood Center for teen parents and their children. School staff ensures that parenting classes are part of students' Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Transportation (bus) is provided for both student and child to and from school. The children and students are also provided free meals.

On-site counselors provide specialized services to students who are having issues away from school.

Example E: *One Stop Multiservice Charter*
                 Tier 1 School (1,140 students)

One Stop Multiservice Charter operates a Career Pathways Program called Kids Opportunity. Students who participate in this program are required to complete a questionnaire describing their vocational interests for the future. Based on their interest, students complete a short- and long-term career plan.

In addition, One Stop Multiservice Charter has a mentoring program using local business leaders. The mentors fill out a questionnaire to determine the type of student they would

like to work with based on interests. School staff use the information that mentors provided to pair students with mentors in the Career and Technical Education Program.

Example F: Socorro ISD
Tier 3 District, Large District (38,357 students)

The district has a "Heart-to-Heart" mentoring program. This program is also used at Options High School. The school staff are assigned as mentors to the students. Each student has a mentor. The student and his/her mentor meet once a week. The school also offers a "Connect with Kids" Program that is a life skills/character education program. The social worker administers this program. The school also runs a bus that takes students with babies to daycare and then to school.

Example G: Lake Worth ISD
Tier 1 District, Small District (2,751 students)

Mentoring is informal and is carried out by a number of staff members. Teachers are assigned to meet with students each week and set goals for the next week. The teachers check on the progress of each student. The school has an at-risk coordinator who also visits the students regularly. In addition, the school's job coach talks to the students as a support system.

The school has a Character Education Program where staff members talk about choices. If a student needs a social service, school staff teaches them how to find it or how to make the contact.

Lake Worth ISD also has a daycare center. Students must work in the center and attend school every day to qualify. Even when a student is out of school (e.g., working at his/her job) he/she can leave their child at the daycare center as long as their school attendance is good. Every child receives a free breakfast and lunch; infants receive free baby formula.

The district's Parent Education Program pays for day care for teen parents as long as they stay in school and attend class. In addition, the Probation Department counsels the students. If a student has any legal entanglements, a counselor visits with him/her and the social worker holds counseling group sessions. Counselors also provide referrals to outside agencies.

Example H: McKinney ISD
Tier 3 District, Medium District (21,289 students)

McKinney ISD provides transportation to and from school for the school-aged parent and child, as long as the student keeps up attendance. The Life Skills for the School-Age Parent Program offers counseling, enrichment, tutoring, community resources, parental involvement, transportation, goal setting, job training, monitoring of attendance and grades, mentors, and community service referrals. Counselors provide social and academic counseling, crisis counseling, goal setting, and social service referrals (such as local homeless shelters).

Example I: *Manor ISD*
               Tier 1 District, Small District (5,098 students)

Manor ISD offers on-site daycare which staff consider effective in encouraging teen parents to come to school. In addition, the alternative high school (Manor Excel High) has provided space for the local homeless services organization. Students who need assistance with housing, clothing, etc. can visit the office on campus.

Example J: *Galveston ISD*
               Recommended District, Small District (8,430 students)

Galveston ISD offers a Teen Parenting Program through the high school; day care is available. The Teen Parenting coordinator from the regular high school meets with students at the alternative campus.

Galveston ISD also provides space at the alternative high school for a Teen Health Center run by the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB).

XII. Special Populations

Objective

Programs, options, and services developed to identify, track, recover, and retain dropouts should be tailored based on the specific characteristics of the dropout population. The following section describes several specific populations and identifies strategies that may be particularly promising for each population.

State of Practice

Based on the statewide survey, recovered students were a diverse group. On average, 52.1 percent of the recovered students were male and 47.9 percent were female; 58.4 percent of the recovered students were economically disadvantaged, and 49.3 percent were 18 or older. More than 16 percent were either pregnant or parents and 11.7 percent had limited English proficiency. A relatively small number of students were migrants (3.3 percent), homeless (2.4 percent), in treatment for substance abuse (2.5 percent), or in the foster care system (0.7 percent).

Promising National or Other State Practices

Some groups of students are at extremely high risk for dropping out and are difficult to recover. Analysis of programs described in the literature reveals several potential key strategies for addressing the needs of these students.

Pregnant Teens: Several programs focus on recruiting potential and actual dropouts from healthcare centers shortly before or after they have had their babies (Weiler 1994, PYN 2006). Other strategies include expanding teen parenting programs, extending district parental leave policies for students, providing technology to facilitate in-home study during parental leave, allowing pregnant teens to apply for childcare subsidies before their babies are born, and expanding the subsidized childcare program to include parents who have not graduated and are under 25 years of age (PYN).

Over-Age, Under-Credited Youth: After an exhaustive analysis of dropout factors, New York City and Philadelphia determined that the most critical characteristic of dropouts was that they were over-age and under-credited (NYCDOE 2006, AYP 2006). (See supporting examples in *Chapter VIII – Program Options* for a complete description of these activities).

Incarcerated Youth/Youth Offenders: Cross-system collaboration is particularly critical in dealing with and recovering incarcerated youth. To recover these youth, programs may use educational liaisons in the State Department of Youth Services to refer juvenile offenders who will be released within three months to social workers who help the youth develop education plans. For example, Youth Opportunity Boston focuses on workforce development/criminal justice/education system-wide collaboration to support "court-involved" youth. Philadelphia launched a juvenile "reintegration" system with Courts & Probation, Workforce Development, and Social Services (NLC 2007). Programs developed under the Youth Opportunity Grants reported working with the juvenile justice

system to access youth at many different points, e.g., through police, prosecutors, courts, and prisons. These programs also established formal agreements with juvenile justice system entities to receive students as part of release programming (Harris 2006). Other strategies to address the needs of this group include ensuring curricula at juvenile placement sites are of high quality to maximize credit transfer, strengthening career resources at placement facilities, and providing extra transitional support when juvenile offenders return to schools (PYN 2006).

Youth in Foster Care: Youth in foster care face unique challenges, particularly related to the frequency with which they may need to change schools. Coordination and collaboration between schools and foster care systems is critical in helping to identify and recover these students (NLC 2007). Other strategies include strengthening follow-up for foster children who age out of the system, minimizing time out of school when they change foster placements, and emphasizing dual enrollment programs for students within two years of graduation (PYF 2006).

Homeless Youth: No programs studied addressed the issue of serving homeless youth who dropped out, except to note that serving these students represents a significant challenge due to lack of adequate housing (Harris 2006).

Youth with Substance Abuse Issues: No programs studied offered specific successful strategies for meeting the needs of students out of school due to substance abuse. One study that cited assisting high-risk youth, included youth with substance abuse problems as a particular challenge, chiefly because of a lack of resources/knowledge in this area. The researchers posited that greater participation by "health and mental health systems" may help program staff better serve these youth (Harris 2006).

Migrant Youth: There is little information on effective strategies to re-engage migrant youth. One promising program from the University of South Florida serves migrant students who are overage. The program is described in the Supporting Examples section below (Example F).

Who Is Involved

District and school staff should work together to identify the specific characteristics of the dropout population and develop appropriate strategies. As described in *Chapter VIII.1 – Tailoring Program Options to Student Needs*, these staff may include:

- District and school administrative staff;
- School instructional staff;
- Dropout recovery staff;
- Other district- or school-level program staff (such as Homeless Education liaisons, at-risk coordinators, etc.);
- Recovered dropouts and their families;
- Representatives from various government and non-government agencies serving the population of students identified.

Process

The process for identifying specific characteristics of recovered dropouts is fully described in *Chapter VIII.1 – Tailoring Program Options to Student Needs*. Although typically no two students drop out for exactly the same set of reasons, if large percentages of dropouts belong to one or more of the populations listed below, district and school staff should consider incorporating the following promising strategies into the instructional options (as described in *Chapter VIII.1*) and the social supports (as described in *Chapter XI – Social Supports*) into their dropout recovery program.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and schools reporting "promising practice" in this area, the following strategies have been particularly promising in providing additional academic and social supports to students.

Pregnant Teens

Strategy 1: Offer on-site daycare and parenting classes. (Examples A, B, J, K, L, M, N)

Strategy 2: Work with local clinics and hospitals to identify and recruit pregnant teens and new mothers. (Examples A, B)

Strategy 3: Offer a home-based learning program for pregnant teens/new mothers. (Example G)

Over-Age, Under-Credited Students

Strategy 1: Offer a separate learning community to these students who may feel out of place in a more traditional setting with younger students. (Examples C, D)

Strategy 2: Offer ways to accelerate credit recovery. (Example G)

Migrant Youth

Strategy 1: Coordinate identification and recruitment efforts with the district's Migrant Education liaison. (Examples H, I)

Strategy 2: Work with other migrant worker organizations (not affiliated with the district) to identify and recruit migrant students. (Examples F, I)

Strategy 3: Provide English language support alongside other academic supports. (Example F)

Strategy 4: Use short-term, intensive programs and technology to help students recover credits quickly. (Example I)

Incarcerated Youth

Strategy 1: Coordinate with local law enforcement and juvenile justice agencies to identify and recover students. (Examples B, E)

Strategy 2: Enable students to do coursework while incarcerated, facilitate credit transfer and allow returning students to accelerate credit recovery. (Example B)

Strategy 3: Strengthen academic and social supports to ensure a smooth transition back to school. (Example B)

Homeless Youth

Strategy 1: Coordinate identification and recruitment efforts with the district's Homeless Education liaison. (Example H)

Strategy 2: Work with other local organizations (not affiliated with the district) to identify and recruit homeless students and to create a referral network for services. (Example N)

Youth in Foster Care

Strategy 1: Work with Child Protective Services caseworkers to identify and assist students in the foster care system (who tend to move frequently) and students who are about to "age out" of the foster care system. (Examples B, E)

Youth with Substance Abuse Issues

Strategy 1: Work with local treatment facilities and counselors to identify and recruit students in treatment and to enable students to do coursework while in treatment. (Example G)

Supporting Examples

Example A: Weiler, Jeanne. *Project Return and Babygram Hospital Outreach, 1993-94*. New York City Board of Education Office of Educational Research, 1994.
http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/00000 19b/80/16/5f/5e.pdf

Project Return operated in 19 New York City schools in 1993-1994 and consisted of two approaches. Project Return operated in elementary schools and focused on recovering parents of elementary school students who had not completed school, using programs such as GED coursework, ESL instruction, parenting workshops, etc. Return schools also hosted a 10-week parent-training course conducted by City University of New York (CUNY), and a 10-week hands-on science program. Each site was staffed by a caseworker who was a former teacher.

Babygram Hospital Outreach operated in 12 health facilities and hospitals, and focused on identifying new teen mothers at risk of dropping out. Of note, most of the participants were in 11th or 12th grade upon intake, so the Office of Educational Research found that the outreach program was particularly valuable in preventing female students so close to graduation from dropping out. The Babygram Program intended to implement a "train the trainer" model by providing professional training to hospital/health center staff on parenting skills and identifying who would then train Babygram participants.

Both programs used a "case management" approach, in which a case manager was assigned to each dropout or potential dropout from recruitment, through planning and follow up.

Several programs focus on recruiting potential dropouts from healthcare centers shortly before or after they have had their babies (Weiler 1994, Philadelphia Youth Network 2006). Other strategies include expanding teen parenting programs, extending district parental leave policies for students, providing technology to facilitate in-home study during parental leave, allowing pregnant teens to apply for childcare subsidies before their babies are born, and expanding the subsidized childcare program to include parents who have not graduated and are under 25 years of age.

Example B: *Turning It Around: A Collective Effort to Understand and Resolve Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis*. Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006. http://www.projectuturn.net/downloads/pdf/Turning_it_around_Project_U-Turn.pdf

This report outlined a variety of approaches to address the needs of the most high-risk youth:

- Provide support to juvenile offenders returning to their communities: assessing curricula at juvenile placement sites to promote a standards-based approach (maximizing credit transfer); strengthening job skills/placement offering at delinquent placement facilities, increasing academic and social supports in schools to ensure a smoother transition back to school, finding ways to expedite completion of missed coursework (instead of requiring repetition of entire semesters or grades).
- Provide support to pregnant teens: creating outreach by synthesizing resources at schools, health care facilities, and community organizations; expanding teen parenting programs; change district teen parental leave policy to extend it from one month to six weeks; use technology to provide in-home study while students are on parental leave; allow pregnant teens to apply for childcare subsidies before their children are born; expand the subsidized childcare program to include parents who have not graduated and are under 25.
- Support foster care youth: using and expanding model programs for students aging out of foster care; increase follow-up services for youth leaving foster care; collecting data on students in and out of foster care; minimizing time out of

school when children change dependent placements/schools; develop dual enrollment programs for students within two years of graduation; simplifying the re-enrollment process; provide better social supports; establishing protocols to place returning youth in appropriate programs; standardize quality assurance indicators for educational programming offered by a variety of providers.

Example C: *Serving Older Youth Through a Comprehensive Out-of-School-Time System: Lessons from the AYPF Philadelphia Field Trip*. American Youth Policy Forum, May 2006. http://www.aypf.org/trireports/2006/TR052306

Philadelphia's Career and Academic Development Institute is considered an exemplary accelerated high school targeted at over age dropouts with few credits. The school is operated by the Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America. The school offers year-round, non-traditional hours; assigns a case manager to each student; offers computer-assisted instruction and an online subscription to Internet lessons. Students who complete the program receive a high school diploma.

Example D: *Multiple Pathways Research & Development: Summary Findings and Strategic Solutions for Overage, Under-Credited Youth*. New York City Department of Education, October 2006. http://www.ytfg.org/documents/OMPGOverviewandFindingsBroadDistribution102206.pdf

New York City's Multiple Pathways project consists of four key programs:

Transfer High Schools are small, academic-based, and focus on students who have been enrolled in New York City public high school for at least one year and are far from being promoted on schedule in their current high school. These schools focus on personalized learning environments, rigorous academic standards, student-centered pedagogy, support to meet instructional and developmental goals, and have a focus on college preparation. Over-age under-credited students have an average graduation rate of 56 percent from these schools versus 19 percent for their peers in regular high schools. These schools nearly doubled attendance rates and credit accumulation for the group. All Transfer School students showed an increase in academic performance, with the most challenged students showing the biggest increases.

Young Adult Borough Centers, housed within "host" high schools, are small learning groups that help students earn a diploma and create a post-graduation plan. They are full-time evening academic programs for students who have been in high school for at least four years and have attained a minimum of 17 credits. A non-traditional block schedule allows students to progress rapidly to earn only the credits they lack for graduation. Every center has a community-based organization associated with it. The partner provides youth development support, career and college counseling, and job placement assistance. Students who complete the program receive a diploma from their high school of origin upon completion of credits and the Regents exams. The Young Adult Borough Center Model converts 44 percent of eligible students into high school graduates within

one year.

New York City schools also offer full-time and part-time GED Programs, all of which also incorporate Learning to Work (described below). The Access GED model is a full-time program for over-age under-credited youth that incorporates youth development, integrated thematic units, developmental portfolios, student engagement system, assessment, progression, and connections to post-secondary training and career exploration. The part-time model uses a research-based workshop instructional model with high-quality curriculum materials. The programs' part-time staff are routinely coached in research-based instructional strategies throughout the school year.

The Learning to Work Program focuses on high school completion and connection to work and post-secondary education. Services are provided by community-based organizations and are integrated into the above programs. The program focuses on employability skills development, subsidized internships, college and career counseling, and job placement. The program also implements attendance outreach, individual and group counseling, academic tutoring, and youth development strategies.

Example E: *Beyond City Limits: Cross-System Collaboration to Reengage Disconnected Youth*. National League of Cities, 2007. http://www.nlc.org/ASSETS/986F4B75DF524770A398BF1459940D57/07_YEF_CaseStudies.pdf

The report uses case studies of several programs serving disconnected youth to promulgate the practice of cross-system collaboration:

- Youth Opportunity Boston focuses on workforce development/criminal justice/education system-wide collaboration. It focuses on "court-involved" youth. The program uses educational liaisons in the State Department of Youth Services to refer juvenile offenders who will be released within three months to social workers who help the youth develop education plans.
- San Francisco's joint city-county Human Services Agency and Transitional Youth Task Force focuses on improving outcomes for youth transitioning from foster care.
- In San Diego, the reunification rate for foster care tripled from 20 to 60 percent and the number of children entering the system dropped by a third because of collaboration among probation officers, public schools, and employment and training services offered by the city.

Example F: Cranston-Gingras, Ann. "Reconnecting Youth from Migrant Farmworker Families." *Reclaiming Children & Youth*, Winter 2003, Vol. 11 Issue 4, p. 242.
http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ662376&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ662376

One promising program from the University of South Florida serves migrant students who are over age (16 to 54 year-olds). The program is funded through the Higher Education Act, which funds High School Equivalency Programs (HEPs) at post-secondary institutions. The program employs a full-time outreach specialist who identifies students and determines whether they are most in need of services and likely to complete the program. Recruiters work with farm labor organizations, migrant advocacy programs, churches, and health agencies, as well as formal K-12 and higher education programs focused on migrants, to find students.

The academic program is individualized and focused on changing students' past negative perceptions of school. Instruction is provided using the Internet, e-mail, and in person. There are two primary components to the academic program—GED curriculum and Learning Resource instruction (training in academic learning strategies). Support and tutoring are also provided to students with limited English proficiency (LEP). Each student has an Individualized Achievement Plan with appropriate formative and summative assessments.

The program has a Community Living component that includes classes on life skills, socio-cultural development (with assistance from university organizations for Latin American students), and community service projects.

The program also employs a full-time Transition Specialist who provides services based on student aptitude and interest, including vocational evaluation and counseling, career exploration and shadowing, "employability skill training" (how to find a job, how to interview, resume writing, interpersonal skills), and post-secondary placement. Program staff follow up with former students to ensure they stay on track with their school and work plans. The center maintains a toll free number to assist follow-up, and keeps resumes on file. Former students receive a program newsletter and are invited to attend the yearly graduation ceremony

Example G: *Bay Area Charter School*
              Tier 1 School (92 students)

The school's self-paced software program makes under-credited students feel motivated. The school has a homebound program and serves pregnant students. Bay Area Charter has, according to the superintendent, a 90 percent success rate with over-age and under-credited students. Among pregnant students only one out of six (16.7 percent) dropped out. The school has been successful with students who have a drug problem; these students attend a drug rehab program and manage to stay in school and graduate.

Example H: *Sherman ISD*
        Tier 1 District, Small District (6,424 students)

The school works closely with both the district's Homeless Education and Migrant Education Departments. The Migrant Education director serves on the district's task force for dropout identification and recovery.

Example I: *Weslaco ISD*
        Recommended District, Medium District (15,933 students)

About 15 percent of Weslaco ISD's recovered dropouts are migrant students. The district has eight migrant coordinators who go into the community to recover students. Migrant students are allowed to check out laptops from the school. In addition, the district used money through local migrant funds to send students to a six-week program at the local college where they attended classes during the day and worked at night.

Example J: *Sherman ISD*
        Tier 1 District, Small District (6,424 students)

Sherman ISD runs a bus service for teen parents and their babies to the daycare center on campus.

Example K: *Deer Park ISD*
        Tier 1 District, Medium District (12,421 students)

Deer Park ISD operates an Early Childhood Center for teen parents and their children. School staff ensure that parenting classes are part of students' Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Transportation (bus) is provided for both student and child to and from school. The children and students are provided free meals.

Example L: *Lake Worth ISD*
        Tier 1 District, Small District (2,751 students)

Lake Worth ISD has a daycare center. Students must work in the center and attend school every day to qualify. Even when a student is out of school (e.g., working at his/her job) he/she can leave their child at the daycare as long as their school attendance is good. Every child receives a free breakfast and lunch; infants receive free baby formula.

Example M: *McKinney ISD*
        Tier 3 District, Medium District (21,289 students)

McKinney ISD provides transportation to and from school for the school-aged parent and child, as long as the student keeps up attendance. The Life Skills for the School-Age Parent Program offers counseling, enrichment, tutoring, community resources, parental involvement, transportation, goal setting, job training, monitoring of attendance and grades, mentors, and community service referrals.

Example N: *Manor ISD*
             Tier 1 District, Small District (5,098 students)

Manor ISD offers on-site daycare which staff consider effective in encouraging teen parents to come to school. In addition, the alternative high school (Manor Excel High) has provided space for the local homeless services organization. Students who need assistance with housing, clothing or who have other needs can visit the office on campus.

XIII. Post-Secondary Advancement Supports

Objective

To provide credit recovery and post-secondary academic services to recovered dropouts and to students who are at-risk of dropping out; allowing these students not only to complete high school but also earn college credit before they graduate from high school; thereby easing their transition and setting them on a road to college.

State of Practice

Typically, dropouts lack enough academic credits to graduate and are placed in a credit recovery program. The statewide survey showed that the credit recovery program is usually provided through an alternative high school (72.2 percent). Districts, however, also collaborate with local colleges and universities to administer their dropout recovery program (5.0 percent) or most commonly to offer academic services specifically to students at risk of dropping out and to those who are recovered dropouts. More than 40 percent of the districts and charter schools collaborate with post-secondary institutions such as community colleges (40.8 percent) and universities (8.4 percent). More than one-fifth of the districts and charter schools with dropout recovery programs allow their students to earn college credits while in high school. A few of the districts (2.3 percent) offer an adult education GED Program through a community college.

Promising National or Other State Practices

Alternative education programs recognize that GED preparation is no longer sufficient (Steinberg & Almeida 2004, Woods 1995) or an acceptable alternative to high school graduation (Wilkinson 1994). While post-secondary education is increasingly seen as a requisite to many jobs and careers, it is important to guide high school students to define their long-term career goals. This may include the development of "life plans" that incorporate both educational and career-related goals. Some alternative education programs with recovered dropouts employ career specialists to assist with career/job-related issues. These career specialists arrange college visits, internships, job-search assistance, job shadowing, career field trips, and business tours. Some programs also offer workshops on college preparation, life skills, and financial aid (Chmelynski 2006).

Dropout recovery programs are also focusing on getting students who have dropped out not only on track for a high school diploma, but for enrollment in college (Almeida, Johnson & Steinberg 2006). Particular strategies associated with this feature include dual enrollment and agreements between school districts and local colleges enrolling students in combined high school and college courses after one semester of intensive academics. In the Portland (Oregon) Community College's Gateway to College programs, 83 percent of the students reached college level reading proficiency and 70 percent completed college preparatory courses, ready to enroll in regular college courses (Steinberg & Almeida 2004).

Who Is Involved

Involvement will depend on the services the post-secondary institution is providing to the district or charter school. Typically, the district and the president of the local community college, four-year college or university set up an agreement or memorandum of understanding specifying the services the post-secondary institution will provide to the district or charter school. The agreement specifies the college administrators, staff (i.e. case manager) and faculty who will provide services, courses to be taught, the delivery medium (via distance learning, on college campus, on alternative high school campus), costs for tuition and books, etc.

Process

Collaboration between a district and a post-secondary institution can take many forms. The post-secondary institution can provide assistance with college information, completing college and financial aid applications, dual-credit courses, GED services, and the operation of a college-based credit recovery and early college program. Collaboration services targeted to recovered dropouts and to students at-risk of dropping out consist mainly of the last two: GED services and the operation of a credit recovery and early college program. This program can be located on the college campus or in an independent location.

College-Administered GED Services

Please note that college-administered GED services can be more effective than district-administered GED services because the transition from GED success to college entrance and persistence is easier. Students participating in a college-based GED Program are already familiar with the campus, the faculty, and with other college students.

1. The district identifies the local community college that offers a GED Program.

2. The district gets information from the community college about its GED Program: credit requirements, application, and costs.

3. The district refers students and recovered dropouts to the college's GED Program.

4. The district monitors the students and recovered dropouts it referred to the college for GED until they complete the program.

Credit Recovery and Early College Programs

Please note that a single district or a group of districts can establish the credit recovery and early college program in collaboration with a college.

1. Determine the number of seniors who will not graduate with their class and the number of recovered dropouts and analyze their academic and TAKS deficiencies/needs.

2. Partner with a local community college or university to establish a program for these seniors and recovered dropouts.

3. Determine program costs and allocation of costs to district and to college.

4. Develop with the college partner an academic program to meet the needs of this student population that enables them to graduate from high school and start college.

5. Determine location of program and space needed (i.e. on college campus, in a location in the district(s), or in an independent location).

6. Determine number and type of faculty needed.

7. Determine other resources needed (computers, books, etc.).

8. Publicize program and recruit students to program.

9. Implement program.

10. Evaluate program success; i.e. number of students and recovered dropouts graduating from high school; number of students and recovered dropouts taking college courses; number of students and recovered dropouts continuing in college after program completion.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and schools reporting "promising practice" in this area, the following strategies have been particularly promising in supporting students' high school completion and post-secondary plans.

Strategy 1: Identify a local community college offering a GED Program and refer students at risk of dropping out and dropouts who want to get a GED to the program. (Example A)

Strategy 2: Partner with a local college to offer a fifth-year option for students who lack credits to graduate with their class, failed a section of TAKS, or dropped out. Offer a program that will provide credit recovery, TAKS remediation and college courses. (Example B)

Strategy 3: Partner with other districts in the area and with a centrally-located college to offer a credit recovery and early college program on the college campus to at-risk students and recovered dropouts. (Examples C and D)

Supporting Examples

Example A:　　*Frisco ISD*
　　　　　　　Tier 1 District, Medium District (23,777 students)

　　　　　　　Boling ISD
　　　　　　　Tier 2 District, Small District (975 students)

　　　　　　　Midway ISD
　　　　　　　Tier 3 District, Small District (6,259 students)

Frisco ISD refers students to the Colin County Community College GED Program. The district monitors these students until they get their GED.

Boling ISD refers students and dropouts to Wharton Junior College for a GED Program.

Midway ISD refers students who are 18 or older to McClenon Community College for a GED.

Example B:　　*Pharr San Juan Alamo (PSJA) ISD*
　　　　　　　Recommended District, Large District (30,300 students)

The College, Career and Technology Academy opened in September 2007 in partnership with South Texas College (STC) not only to help potential and recovered dropouts graduate from high school but to allow them to actually start their college education at the same time, thereby offering a seamless transition to college. The Academy opened to meet the needs of students in the Class of 2007 that were not able to graduate from high school because they lacked three or fewer credits or did not pass one section of TAKS. PSJA ISD did not have a program that could accommodate such a large number of students.

The College, Career and Technology Academy is located in an old Wal-mart building. The Academy has a principal, six teachers, a lab manager, a counselor, a community liaison, a clerk and a secretary. It offers two sessions a day, allowing students to attend either from 8:00 to 12:00 or from 12:30 to 4:30. The Academy offers childcare through a contract with local daycare providers. In addition to high school classes in the four core subject areas, it offers a "College Success" course that orients students to college. It also offers, once students pass TAKS, a mini-semester at STC where students can earn up to four college credits. Students can take STC courses in medical terminology, body systems, Business Computer Information Systems I and II, welding, and training to become an electrician. These college courses were chosen based on student interest. Most of the students graduate from the Academy with some college credit.

In January 2008, the Academy began to admit students up to the age of 25. PSJA ISD expanded its publicity and recruitment effort through posters at busy intersections, flyers, television spots on the district's channel, public service announcements (PSAs) and radio

advertisements targeting students 18 to 25 who lack a high school diploma.

The College, Career and Technology Academy is considered a big success in the district. It has offered the district a way to deal with non-graduating seniors and dropouts. In May 2008, all non-graduating seniors, more than 200, were placed in the Academy. The Academy has also provided a successful model for a smooth transition of students from high school to college.

Example C: Gateway to College, San Antonio College
Recommended Practice, Partnership of Seven Districts and a Charter
School: San Antonio ISD, North East ISD, Alamo Heights ISD,
Northside ISD, Comal ISD, New Braunfels ISD, Judson ISD and
George Sanchez Charter

Gateway to College was founded in 2000 through a partnership with Portland Community College in Portland, Oregon and the Early College High School Initiative. The program operates on the San Antonio College campus. San Antonio College applied for a Gates Foundation grant to start the Gateway to College Program. Gateway to College offers a second chance to high school dropouts or those thinking of dropping out ages 16 to 20 with fewer than 17 credits to complete high school and earn college credit. In 2004-05, Bexar County had 1,604 dropouts and in 2005-06 it had 1,500 dropouts.

The program partners are seven school districts and one charter school. These include: San Antonio ISD, North East ISD, Alamo Heights ISD, Northside ISD, Comal ISD, New Braunfels ISD, Judson ISD and George Sanchez Charter that accepts students up to the age of 26. The program at San Antonio College is the only one in the U.S. that has a combination of school districts and charter schools. The program has a memorandum of understanding with each of the partners. The program has an advisory board consisting of representatives from each of the partner school districts and charter school, the program director, and the San Antonio College president. The board meets four times a year. It provides reports to each participating district and charter school.

As part of the grant, the college provides space and equipment and waives tuition. The program started in August 2007 with 50 students, plans to have 100 students in 2008-09 and its goal is to have 300 students in three years. The program recruits students through presentations to school boards and in school districts, radio and television announcements, word of mouth, and students recruiting other students.

Staff consists of a director, two support staff, an office manager, two writing teachers, one reading teacher, one math teacher that the program got through the college, and two TAKS tutors (math and social studies). The teachers are both highly experienced high school teachers and college instructors.

Gateway to College is a two-year program graduating students under the Recommended High School Program. In reviewing applications, the program gives preference to older students. The program covers tuition, books, a parking permit or bus pass and a daily

meal. Students in the program take 12 to 15 hours of college courses (equal to a savings of $691 to $826 in tuition). Other savings include bus passes ($25 per semester) or a parking permit ($21 for the year), a daily meal ($2.47 per day funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture), and books (costs vary from $700 to $1,000 a year). Students must complete 26 high school credits to graduate. Students are in classes from 9:00 to 2:00 five days a week for 240 days a year. In addition to high school credit-recovery courses, students take a college success course that teaches time management and goal setting techniques. Students learn effective listening and note taking skills, textbook-study methods, strategies for preparing and taking tests, and techniques to boost memory and concentration. Students also have to do a research project on their career of choice. The objective is to clarify the direction of the students' academic pursuit, better understand the chosen field of study, and create a path to reach career goals.

Example D: *Graduate Assistance Program, Howard College*
Recommended Practice, Partnership of Six Districts: *Forsan ISD, Coahoma ISD, Garden City ISD, Grady ISD, Greenwood ISD, and Stanton ISD*

The Graduate Assistance Program (GAP) is a fully-accredited program with six school district partners: Forsan ISD, Coahoma ISD, Garden City ISD, Grady ISD, Greenwood ISD, and Stanton ISD. The six districts established a co-op in 1979 to address their increasing dropout rates and the insurmountable time and expense involved in preventing and recovering dropouts for small districts. The districts agreed to share their resources in order to provide services and staff for the program. The program was moved to Howard College in 2001 to have more classroom space and be in a more central location. Howard College is centrally located relative to the co-op districts and provides two rooms for GAP. Howard College also provides access to T1 fiber-optic lines, the World Wide Web, the Region 18 Educational Service Center, and distance learning.

GAP at Howard College is targeted at students who are at risk of dropping out or who are recovered dropouts. GAP has a self-paced, computerized alternative education program. The program provides the opportunity for at-risk and recovered students to learn the necessary and required course content that will allow them to graduate from high school. Students are expected to attend GAP according to the school calendar of the fiscal agent, Stanton ISD, or their home campus. A distance GAP Program was created in August 2006 to serve students in member districts for whom transportation is difficult. The GAP curriculum was made web based and opened multiple opportunities for increased accessibility.

A teacher who serves homebound students travels throughout the co-op area to work with students. She also works at GAP at Howard College when needed or when her homebound student load is not at full capacity. The districts and superintendents cooperate and work closely together. For instance, not all distance learning ports in all the districts are always in use. If there is a greater need at some districts, the superintendents call each other to arrange the use of another district's ports for a period of time. Each port costs the district $1,160 annually. This cooperative sharing is beneficial and saves money

for all the districts. Greenwood ISD provides a room at the high school dedicated to GAP where students work with a monitor. Students in Greenwood ISD cannot attend GAP at Howard College. Howard College serves all the districts in the co-op except Greenwood because Greenwood is not in the Junior College District served by Howard College.

Eligible students may participate through concurrent enrollment in classes offered by Howard College. Tuition, fees, and books are the responsibility of the students. Students may also participate in vocational courses on campus outside of concurrent enrollment, such as Cosmetology, Dental Hygiene, Emergency Medical Services, Nursing, Child and Family Development, Computer and Information Sciences, and Criminal Justice Technology.

The program works well at Howard College because the students in the program appreciate being on a college campus. Students enroll in concurrent college courses at Howard College while finishing their courses for high school graduation; these courses include English IV/English 1301-1302, government/economics, history, math, speech, and vocational courses. Once these students start at Howard College, they tend to stay there to earn an Associate's Degree or credits to transfer to a larger college or university.

XIV. Dropout Recovery Funding and Costs

Objective

To establish and operate a dropout recovery program that meets students' academic, support and social service needs, the program has to have sufficient, stable and sustained funding.

State of Practice

Districts and charter schools with dropout recovery programs that responded to the statewide survey identified a multitude of sources through which they fund their program. Most commonly, districts and charter schools use state funds for the program (81.9 percent); 42.5 percent use federal funds; 19.1 percent use grants as a funding source; and 13.7 percent use local funds. Other sources of funding mentioned include: county (4.7 percent) and community (5.0 percent) funds, community college funds (1.0 percent), donations (5.7 percent), in-kind donations (3.3 percent), and funds from private foundations (2.7 percent).

Districts and charter schools do not typically have a separate "dropout recovery" program budget or a "dropout recovery" line item in their budget. Consequently, districts do not know the actual cost of the program or cost per recovered dropout.

Dropout recovery program costs are calculated in a wide variety of ways. Districts where the responsibility for dropout recovery lies with high school principals usually lack district-wide cost information associated with the program. Principals with a responsibility for dropout recovery define this area of responsibility and the associated activities in different ways and allocate different costs to the function. Less than 65 percent of the districts and charter schools were able to provide dropout recovery program financial information for 2004-05 through 2006-07. Between five and nine percent of the districts and charter schools with dropout recovery programs indicated that although they have a dropout recovery program they do not have a budget line item for this program and hence they did not formally "spend any funds on the program." Others considered their entire high school budget as their dropout recovery budget.

The financial data that districts and charter schools provided ranges widely, independently of the size of their recovered dropout population and in all probability overstates the amount of funds districts actually allocate to dropout recovery activities. Using these data, districts and charter schools spent, on average, about $400,000 a year over the last three years on their dropout recovery program. In 2006-07, nearly 42 percent of the districts and charter schools spent $100,000 or less on dropout recovery activities. In 2006-07, 5.0 percent of the districts and charter schools with dropout recovery programs reported spending no funds on dropout recovery; 9.7 percent spent $10,000 or less; 18.1 percent spent $10,001 to $50,000; and 9.0 percent spent $50,001 to $100,000.

Estimating the costs of dropout recovery is complex because dropout recovery activities are clearly defined only for part of the process: the identification, tracking and recovery

phases. Even for these parts of the process, districts use staff for whom dropout recovery is a minor, infrequent responsibility. Once re-enrolled, recovered dropouts are integrated, usually, into the district's alternative academic high school joining its at-risk student population. The alternative academic high school does not differentiate in terms of teachers, staff, services or costs between its recovered students and its at-risk students.

Promising National or Other State Practices

Consistent, long-term funding is critical in creating effective, sustained programs. Several dropout recovery programs studied were discontinued or scaled back, despite indications of success, because of funding cutbacks and the inability to replace funding (Weiler 1994, Harris 2006, Knepper 1988). Some programs assured their longevity by seeking sustained funding through social service agencies such as juvenile justice and social welfare or by establishing a charter school (Martin & Halperin 2006).

Who Is Involved

Funding dropout recovery activities is usually not seen as a separate function or responsibility from funding other education activities. At the district level, personnel involved in preparing the budget and seeking and securing funding may include the superintendent or assistant superintendent for business, office of special programs, grants office, director of dropout prevention/dropout recovery, and principal of the alternative academic high school.

Process

The following steps are recommended for all districts and schools. The steps may be modified to best fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

1. Estimate the cost of implementing a dropout recovery program including dropout identification, tracking, recovery, re-enrollment, and the provision of social, educational, job-related, and college preparation services to the district's students who dropped out.

2. Estimate state, federal, and local funds available for the program.

3. Determine the need to seek other sources of funding and the amount of additional funding needed, and identify potential funding sources.

4. Develop and implement a plan, including procedures and assigned staff, to apply for funding from these sources. Assess the amount and continuity of funding from these sources.

5. Analyze program costs and available funds annually.

Promising Strategies

None of the Texas districts and schools with dropout recovery promising practices addressed the issue of the cost of dropout recovery and the funding needed to provide appropriate services. Promising practices in this area are limited to the identification and

use of multiple funding sources. Accessing multiple funding sources, however, does not ensure funding stability to sustain the program long term. Examples from responding school districts, schools, and national research provide additional detail.

Strategy 1: Identify multiple sources for funding dropout recovery and obtain access to these funds. Funding sources may include federal and state education funds, local funds, funds from social agencies such as juvenile justice and social welfare, grants from public and private foundations, donations from local business, in-kind donations, and fee-for-service. (Examples A through H)

Supporting Examples

Example A: *Lake Worth ISD*
                    Tier 1 District, Small District (2,751 students)

Lake Worth ISD uses multiple funding sources: federal (Title 1) and state (high school allotment, compensatory education) funds; grants such as the First Lady Literacy Grant, a collaboration grant with the Health Department; and donations from local businesses such as Target and Wal-mart.

Example B: *McKinney ISD*
                    Tier 3 District, Medium District (21,289 students)

McKinney ISD funds its dropout recovery program through federal and state funds, local funds, and through an annual grant for Life Skills for the School-Age Parent that covers about 30 percent of its program costs.

Example C: *Midway ISD*
                    Tier 3 District, Small District (6,259 students)

Midway ISD funds its dropout recovery activities through federal and state funds, grants and in-kind donations.

Example D: *Mineola ISD*
                    Tier 1 District, Small District (508 students)

Mineola ISD uses federal (migrant funds) and state (high school allotment) funds, grants and funds from private foundations: the Lions Club provides in-kind donations for students.

Example E: *North East ISD*
                    Tier 3 District, Large District (61,255 students)

North East ISD uses state (29 percent) and local funds (70 percent) and supplements this with funds from private foundations and donations.

Example F: *One Stop Multiservice Charter*
                     Tier 1 School (1,140 students)

One Stop Multiservice Charter uses No Child Left Behind federal funds, state funds, and a Texas Education Excellence Award grant.

Example G: *Sanford-Fritch ISD*
                     Tier 1 District, Small District (906 students)

Sanford-Fritch ISD funds its dropout recovery program using federal funds (Carl Perkins – CTE), State Compensatory Education funds, local funds and fee-for-service for its daycare. State funds cover 80 percent of program costs, local funds contribute 10 percent, federal funds contribute five percent, and fee-for-service funds contribute five percent.

Example H: Martin, N., & Halperin, S. *Whatever It Takes: How Twelve Communities Are Reconnecting Out-Of-School Youth*. American Youth Policy Forum, 2006. http://www.aypf.org/publications/WhateverItTakes/WITfull.pdf

Programs for at-risk youth including recovered dropouts established in the cities of Baltimore, Oakland, the Salt Lake School District, and Portland Public Schools use a mixture of funding sources.

The programs in Baltimore focus on education through experiential learning, life-skills, job-readiness, and civic works in small, specialized classes. Some of the programs work in conjunction with local community colleges where students can earn either their high school diploma and college credits or work towards a GED. Most of the programs also focus on job skill training for high-demand professions in the Baltimore area. All of the programs also meet social needs of the students. The program funding has come through a combination of public school funds, local and state funds, foundation grants, federal grants, and in-kind donations.

The Salt Lake School District program targets immigrants and combines prevention and recovery. They operate an extensive network of one main site and 29 satellite sites throughout the community. The program offers a variety of educational opportunities including a high school serving teens, an adults only high school focused specifically on recovery, an ESL program, and a young parent program. Classes are year-round at the main site and are available from 7:30 AM to 9:30 PM and from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM on Saturdays. Classes for the adult program are year-round, open entry and exit, evening courses. Through the community food bank, dinner is served to the students and their families each evening and students receive monthly food drops. The program is funded from a combination of public school, state, and federal funding and several grants.

Portland Public Schools (PPS) is required by a state statute to attempt recovery of out-of-school students through direct services or contracts with private institutions. In addition to three evening high schools within the district, Portland created 19 programs that address student needs and then prepare students for their appropriate educational tract

(high school diploma or GED, employment, or transitioning to public school). While PPS funds many of the programs through State School Funds, each of those dollars is matched by funds from private foundations and contributions and other public funds.

When the Oakland Unified School District filed for bankruptcy in 2002, two established non-profit agencies stepped in to help recover the many students leaving school. One of the two agencies – East Bay Conservation Corps – focuses primarily on education and the other – Youth Employment Partnership – focuses on job-readiness. Funding is provided through state and charter school funds, donations, foundation grants, fee-for-service contracts, and the state's recycling program that refunds deposits on bottles.

XV. Dropout Recovery Program Evaluation

Objective
Evaluate the effectiveness of the district or school program in identifying, tracking and recovering students who dropped out, in re-enrolling these students and having them complete and graduate from high school ready for work or post-secondary education.

State of Practice
The statewide survey showed that districts and charter schools use a range of dropout recovery effectiveness measures. The effectiveness measures fall into three categories:

1. Dropout tracking and recovery measures.
2. Measures pertaining to in-school performance.
3. Outcome measures.

Measures addressing dropout tracking and recovery include:
- Percentage of dropouts who were tracked;
- Percentage of dropouts who were recovered.

Measures reflecting in-school performance include:
- Attendance rate;
- Disciplinary rate;
- Increase in grade point average (GPA); and
- Performance on TAKS.

Outcome measures refer to:
- Recidivism;
- Receiving high school diploma;
- Receiving a GED;
- Placement in jobs and in post-secondary institutions.

The survey focused on post-recovery measures. The most common measures used by districts and charter schools, according to the statewide survey, consist of:

- The number of recovered students receiving high school diplomas (88.6 percent).
- Recovered students' attendance rate (78.3 percent).
- Recovered students' performance on TAKS (66.2 percent).
- Disciplinary rate (39.8 percent).
- Number receiving GED (32.4 percent).
- Number attending post-secondary institutions (20.4 percent).
- Increase in GPA (17.7 percent).
- Number placed in jobs (8.0 percent).
- Recidivism rate (8.0 percent).

Forty-four percent of the districts and charter schools reported performing a formal evaluation of their dropout recovery programs. Most of these districts and charter schools designate that responsibility to program staff (92.4 percent) or to the district evaluation department (48.5 percent). In a few of these districts, a district administrator or principal (5.3 percent), a district department (5.3 percent), or the school board (2.3 percent) evaluates the program. Ten of the 132 districts and charter schools (7.6 percent) that evaluate the program formally use outside evaluators. However, in follow-up interviews with selected districts and charter schools that reported doing a formal evaluation, none was able to provide documents describing the evaluation design, instruments, evaluation results or an evaluation report.

The data that districts and charter schools with dropout recovery programs have on identifying, tracking, recovering, re-enrolling and serving recovered dropout are not easily available because they are not isolated in a dedicated database. Consequently, such data are not used systematically to evaluate the effectiveness of the district's or school's efforts in recovering dropouts or the effectiveness in serving these students. Even districts and schools reporting that they evaluate their dropout recovery program "formally" do not have documented evidence of their evaluation design, instruments, results and reports. Regardless of size, at most, these districts have some statistical data showing number or percentage of students who are still enrolled, completed high school, got a GED, or who dropped out again. None of the districts or charter schools conducts rigorous evaluations using comparison groups or following all their students in a systematic way once they exit the program with regard to post-secondary education and employment. Post-secondary data is typically anecdotal.

Promising National or Other State Practices

Alternative education programs, where students who dropped out are typically placed after being recovered, use measures of success that are different from those of regular schools. These measures of success may differ across districts or within districts with multiple alternative programs. For example, a charter school focusing on out-of-school youth may be evaluated using different measures than a vocational/GED Program operating within the same district. Both programs serve at-risk youth, but their success may be measured differently. Academic gains are an important component among other standardized program success measures in *all* these programs' measures of success (Hoye & Sturgis 2005).

However, many of the dropout recovery programs studied simply did not have good enough data for specific, valid conclusions to be drawn about their success. Typically, evidence of success was anecdotal (Weiler 1994). In several studies, researchers included recommendations to shore up evaluation efforts or put them in place *before* programs began operations (Weiler 1994, Aron).

Several programs compensate for their limited evaluation capabilities through collaboration with local universities or colleges. School districts have collaborated with local universities to collect and analyze student data and measure whether and the extent

to which the dropout recovery program achieved its objectives (Martin & Halperin, 2006; PYN 2006; National league of Cities 2007; NYC DOE 2006).

A few programs also follow students past graduation, gathering statistics on college enrollment, work status, vocational school enrollment, and military enrollment (Chmelynski 2006, Cranston-Gingras 2003).

Researchers acknowledged that the greatest challenge in determining the impact of a multi-feature dropout recovery program is the difficulty of isolating which component of the program is particularly effective (Stern 1986).

Who Is Involved

The evaluation will involve a school, district or external evaluation team. The evaluation team will consist of individuals with program evaluation and analytical expertise in quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The evaluation will also include administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents and community members associated with the program(s) serving recovered dropouts, as data sources. A comparison group may also be involved, if it is part of the evaluation scope. If the evaluation has a post-secondary tracking component, it will include post-secondary administrators and employers.

Process

The steps listed below represent a formal evaluation. The formal evaluation involves a documented evaluation methodology, multiple data sources and data collection instruments, quantitative and qualitative data, analysis, and an evaluation report that summarizes results and sets forth recommendations. The evaluation steps also assume that the district has set up a process to track students post high school regarding college education and employment.

These steps are recommended for all districts and schools, regardless of their size and number of recovered students. However, the steps may be modified to best fit the district's or school's specific needs and composition.

1. Assign a team to design and conduct the evaluation of the dropout recovery program. Team members may include district evaluation department staff, dropout recovery program staff, or an external organization with which the district partners for the evaluation. An external partner may be a college or university or a professional evaluation organization.

2. Design the evaluation of the dropout recovery program. Evaluation design components consist of: key evaluation questions, measures of program effectiveness, specification of data sources, and development of data collection instruments and data collection procedures.

3. Collect quantitative data on recovered dropouts. Quantitative data (measures of effectiveness) may include:
   - Number and percentage of students identified/classified as dropouts.
   - Demographic profile of dropouts (age, gender, ethnicity, special population (e.g. teen parent, migrant, homeless, etc.)).
   - Number and percentage of dropouts who were tracked.
   - Number and percentage of dropouts who were recovered/re-enrolled.
   - Demographic profile of recovered dropouts (age, gender, ethnicity, special population (e.g. teen parent, migrant, homeless, etc.)).
   - Attendance rate of recovered dropouts.
   - Disciplinary rate.
   - Average number of credits recovered per student.
   - Increase in grade point average (GPA).
   - Recovered dropouts' performance on TAKS.
   - Recidivism rate (number and percentage who dropped out).
   - Number and percentage of recovered dropouts enrolled in dual credit programs.
   - Number and percentage of recovered dropouts who received a high school diploma under the Minimum High School Program.
   - Number and percentage of recovered dropouts who received a high school diploma under the Recommended High School Program.
   - Number and percentage of recovered dropouts who received a GED.
   - Number and percentage of recovered dropouts placed in jobs after graduation.
   - Number and percentage of recovered dropouts enrolled in post-secondary institutions.

4. Collect qualitative data on recovered dropouts. Qualitative data may be generated through student surveys, individual and group interviews of administrators, teachers and staff, and observations.

   - Survey of recovered students. The purpose of the student surveys is to gauge their experience in the dropout recovery program, their level of success, and their post high school plans. The survey can be conducted online or on paper. The student survey may address: reasons for dropping out; length of being out of school; the re-enrollment experience; having an individual graduation plan; the school's atmosphere; helpfulness of administrators, teachers and staff; availability of a mentor; closeness with staff; the types of classes student takes (credit recovery, TAKS remediation, dual credit, etc.); student's success in the classes (how well the student copes with academics); the level of flexibility of the schedule; services student receives and their helpfulness; whether student needs additional services that are not available; student's post-secondary plans; student's preparedness for college; student's preparedness for work.

- Interviews with dropout recovery program administrators at the district and school level may address: the identification, tracking and dropout recovery frequency, process, procedures and effectiveness; the placement of recovered students; the re-enrollment process; the development of an individual graduation plan; adequacy of teacher and staff resources; the effectiveness of the academic program; collaboration with other organizations; services available to recovered students; services students need but are not available; monitoring recovered students; assistance with college and job preparedness; preparedness of students for post-secondary education or employment; program strengths and weaknesses and suggested changes.
- Interviews with dropout recovery teachers and staff will address issues such as the effectiveness of the curriculum in meeting student needs; adequacy of technology; the extent to which the program removes barriers to attendance and completion/graduation; effectiveness of collaboration with other organizations and agencies; extent to which the program meets students' social service needs; program success in establishing close relationship with students; how student progress is being monitored; helping students to prepare for post-secondary education and employment; program strengths and weaknesses; suggestions for change.
- Observations of physical layout of school; interactions between administrators, teachers and staff and students; classroom layout and equipment; direct instruction and student self-paced learning.

5. Use a comparison group to determine the relative effectiveness of the program for recovered dropouts. In most districts, recovered dropouts are placed in the alternative academic high school together with students at risk of dropping out. Students at risk of dropping out are an ideal comparison group because they share the same educational setting as the recovered dropouts and get the same services from the same staff. At minimum, the evaluation team should obtain the following data on the at-risk students:
   - Demographic profile of at-risk students in the alternative high school (age, gender, ethnicity, special population (e.g. teen parent, migrant, homeless, etc.)).
   - Attendance rate.
   - Disciplinary rate.
   - Average number of credits obtained per at-risk student.
   - Increase in grade point average (GPA).
   - Performance on TAKS.
   - Number and percentage of at-risk students enrolled in dual credit programs.
   - Number and percentage of at-risk students who received a high school diploma under the Minimum High School Program.
   - Number and percentage of at-risk students who received a high school diploma under the Recommended High School Program.
   - Number and percentage of at-risk students who received a GED.
   - Number and percentage of at-risk students placed in jobs after graduation.

- Number and percentage of at-risk students enrolled in post-secondary institutions.

6. Analyze data and prepare an evaluation report. The report will present the results of the quantitative and qualitative data collected in association with the key evaluation questions; compare performance of and outcomes for recovered dropouts relative to the comparison group; identify program strengths and weaknesses, and areas in need of improvement. The report should include a set of recommendations for program change and enhancement.

7. Incorporate evaluation results in planning and operations documents such as Campus and District Improvement Plans. Present evaluation results and recommendations to district administrators and staff and to the Board.

Promising Strategies

Based on information collected from national research and from Texas districts and schools reporting "promising practice" in dropout recovery program evaluation, the following strategies have been particularly promising.

Strategy 1: Partner with a college, university or a professional evaluation organization to design, implement, analyze and prepare an evaluation report on the dropout recovery program. (Examples A, E, G, H, I)

Strategy 2: Develop and implement an evaluation design that uses multiple measures and data sources and addresses all program stakeholders. (Examples A, B, D, E)

Strategy 3: Incorporate the use of a comparison group in the evaluation design to measure the relative effectiveness of the dropout recovery program. (Example D)

Strategy 4: Establish a post-secondary tracking process following students (recovered dropouts) in college or employment. Tracking students after high school completion will provide data regarding their college and employment preparedness. (Examples C, F)

Supporting Examples

Example A: *Deer Park ISD*
                Tier 1 District, Medium District (12,421 students)

The district's Evaluation Department conducts an annual formal evaluation. San Jacinto Junior College assists Deer Park in evaluating the program.

Evaluation measures used include:

- Number of students who dropped out by campus;
- Number of students who withdrew and reason for withdrawal: home schooling, to get a GED, etc.;
- Attendance rate;

- Disciplinary rate;
- Performance on TAKS;
- Number receiving high school diplomas;
- Number attending post-secondary institutions;
- Recidivism rate.

The evaluators use the Deer Park ISD student database (SASI) to extract data for the evaluation. The student database has all data on students such as demographics, grades, leaver/dropout reasons, re-enrollment, attendance, behavior problems, and graduation.

The district uses this information to improve the recovery/accelerated program. The district also uses the information to develop individual plans for students needing special services.

Example B: One Stop Multiservice Charter
*   Tier 1 School (1,140 students)*

The school conducts a formal evaluation performed by the Evaluation Department. The evaluation is ongoing throughout the year. The evaluation uses surveys. The evaluation looks at:

- Attendance rate;
- Disciplinary rate;
- Performance on TAKS;
- Number of students receiving high school diplomas;
- Number of students receiving a GED;
- Number attending post-secondary institutions.

The evaluation results guide funding decisions. The results tell the school whether they need more staff, whether they need to invest in staff training, etc.

Example C: Socorro ISD
*   Tier 1 District, Large District (38,357)*

Socorro ISD contracts with the National Student Clearinghouse which tracks their students for four years after high school. The National Student Clearinghouse tracks only college going students but they are able to track them nationally.

Example D: Gateway to College, San Antonio College
*   Recommended Practice*

Gateway to College was founded in 2000 through a partnership with Portland Community College in Portland, Oregon and the Early College High School Initiative. There are 13 Gateway to College Programs in 10 states. Gateway to College offers a second chance to high school dropouts or those thinking of dropping out ages 16 to 20 with fewer than 17 credits to complete high school and earn college credit. Gateway to

College uses the Gates Foundation program evaluation format. The Gates Foundation collects data on the students each semester and compares the student characteristics, services and outcomes at the Gateway to College Program in San Antonio to those in other Gateway to College programs. The Gates Foundation analyzes the data and provides a report to each of its programs.

The evaluation uses data on number of students, student demographics (gender, age, ethnicity), whether students work, living arrangements, number of credits at entry, and GPA. It also collects data on attendance, number of credits earned each semester, GPA each semester, and number of students who withdrew from the program (dropped out). Other data included in the evaluation concerns length of time a student was out of school, reasons for dropping out, assistance students need in order to stay in school, and post-secondary degree sought.

Example E: Multiple Pathways Research & Development: Summary Findings and Strategic Solutions for Overage, Under-Credited Youth. New York City Department of Education, October 2006. http://www.ytfg.org/documents/OMPGOverviewandFindingsBroadDistribution102206.pdf

New York City, through a partnership with the Parthenon Group, backs up its claims of the success of its Transition High Schools and Adult Borough Centers using disaggregated data along multiple measures. Because such detailed analysis of data is time consuming and thus costly, partnerships with private organizations and post-secondary institutions may be an effective strategy for improving evaluation efforts. Comparing over-age, under-credited youth in both transition schools and regular high schools, the program found that transition school students had an average graduation rate of 56 percent versus 19 percent for their peers in regular high schools. These schools nearly doubled attendance rates and credit accumulation for the group compared with regular high schools. All Transition High School students showed an increase in academic performance, with the most challenged students seeing the biggest increases.

Example F: Cranston-Gingras, Ann. "Reconnecting Youth from Migrant Farmworker Families." *Reclaiming Children & Youth*, Winter 2003, Vol. 11 Issue 4, p. 242. http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ662376&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ662376

The program employs a full-time "transition specialist" and offers transition services based on student aptitude and interest. Transition services include: vocational evaluation and counseling, career exploration and shadowing, employability skill training (how to find a job, how to interview, resume writing, interpersonal skills, etc.), and post-secondary placement. Program staff follows up with former students to ensure they stay on track with their school and work plans. The center maintains a toll free number to assist follow-up, and keeps resumes on file. Former students receive a HEP newsletter

and are invited to attend the yearly graduation ceremony.

Example G: Beyond City Limits: Cross-System Collaboration to Reengage Disconnected Youth. National League of Cities, 2007. http://www.nlc.org/ASSETS/986F4B75DF524770A398BF1459940D57/07_YEF_CaseStudies.pdf

Colleges and universities can assist school districts and programs with data collection, analysis, and program evaluation. Corpus Christi ISD formed a partnership with the Social Science Research Center of Texas A&M University to collect and analyze student data and evaluate its program.

Example H: Turning It Around: A Collective Effort to Understand and Resolve Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis. Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN), 2006. http://www.projectuturn.net/downloads/pdf/Turning_it_around_Project_U-Turn.pdf

The University of Pennsylvania hosts the KIDS database to which multiple agencies submit data. This data is made available to advance research in the area of child welfare and well-being. The Philadelphia Youth Transitions Collaborative partnered with the University of Pennsylvania to create a data-driven profile of potential dropouts and out-of-school youth.

Example I: Martin, N., & Halperin, S. Whatever It Takes: How Twelve Communities Are Reconnecting Out-Of-School Youth. American Youth Policy Forum, 2006. http://www.aypf.org/publications/WhateverItTakes/WITfull.pdf

Portland Public Schools (PPS) are required by a state statute to attempt recovery of out-of-school students. Most recovery efforts in Portland focus on teens up to age 21 who have left school or are at risk of leaving school. Many of these students have extenuating social circumstances that make completion of high school in a traditional setting difficult. Recovered dropouts served include at-risk youth, homeless youth, teen parents, drug and alcohol abusers, teens involved in the juvenile justice system, recent immigrants, and English Language Learners. In addition to three evening high schools within the district, Portland created 19 programs that address the needs of students and prepare them for their appropriate educational track (GED or diploma, employment, or transitioning to public school). PPS also has a Gateway to College Program through its partnership with the Portland Community College.

Portland developed a formal evaluation as an important element of their programs. The district partnered with the federally-funded Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory to conduct a structured formal evaluation of their community-based programs annually. The evaluation analyzes attendance, percentage receiving a GED or diploma, moving on to a career, or attending postsecondary education. By contracting with a federal organization, not only does the district have hard data, but the continual oversight has served as an incentive to achieve higher standards.

XVI. Emerging Dropout Recovery Practices

With increased statewide focus on dropout recovery and increased state funding to selected districts, charter schools and colleges for dropout recovery pilots, a range of promising dropout recovery strategies is emerging. These emerging dropout recovery practices go beyond current practices in their singular focus on the recovered dropout as a distinct population group rather than as an at-risk subgroup. The emerging practices emphasize:

- **Removing all barriers** standing in the way of the dropout to re-enroll and succeed. Barriers may include: childcare, transportation, medical/health care, mental health, housing, and food. The emerging practices promote a thorough assessment of recovered dropouts' needs and the availability of services to address all barriers through collaboration with social service agencies/providers. The emerging practices recognize that recovered dropouts are not likely to succeed academically if they have to face socioeconomic barriers.

- **Greater differentiation following re-enrollment** compared to the current blending of recovered dropouts into the at-risk student population. The pilots have shown greater differentiation of recovered dropouts from potential dropouts. Even if dropouts attend an alternative high school, they are given greater flexibility, more services, and more attention; especially if they are older. An emerging practice in some alternative high schools is to create a separate program for recovered dropouts within the school or to open a school just for recovered dropouts. Other emerging practices that differentiate the recovered dropouts from the potential dropouts involves the assignment of specific staff to address the needs of recovered dropouts and monitor their progress, implement a case management approach, and even group them into classes only for recovered dropouts.

- **Connecting the recovered dropout to a caring adult.** Emerging practices show increased recognition of the importance of connecting a recovered dropout to a caring adult. This is done in different ways: by assigning a counselor, case manager, teacher, or other staff to each recovered dropout from re-admission to graduation and beyond.

- **Integrating a case management model.** The emerging promising dropout recovery practices are integrating a true case management approach into their dropout recovery programs. The case manager identifies, coordinates and supervises all the services a recovered dropout gets.

- **Greater flexibility.** Emphasis is given to extending school/program hours to twilight/evening because many recovered dropouts work. Offering just morning and afternoon sessions does not meet the needs of all recovered dropouts.

- **Increasing range of program choices**. The emerging practice is to place the

recovered dropout in the most suitable location rather than the current practice of placing the recovered dropouts in an alternative high school or, in small districts, in a credit recovery lab within the regular high school. That location may be physical or virtual. Physical locations may include the alternative academic high school, an evening program in a regular high school, or a program on a college campus. If a recovered dropout does not want to or cannot physically come to school, he/she can take online classes and complete his/her diploma or pass TAKS. Some of the pilot programs plan to give desktop computers or laptops to recovered dropouts so they can take classes from home without attending any physical location. It should be noted that when students are afforded significant autonomy, monitoring and tracking of student progress must be frequent and sustained.

- **Assigning high quality staff.** While alternative high schools used to be the damping ground of poor teachers, the stress is on high quality staff who are experienced working with at-risk students and dedicated to making a difference.

- **Tailoring the academic program to the recovered dropout's academic status.** The emerging strategy is to optimize the time the recovered dropout has to spend in completing and graduating from high school by differentiating among recovered dropouts and tailoring the academic program specifically to the needs of the individual. So, the program tailored for a recovered dropout who has failed one or more sections of TAKS is different from the program tailored for a recovered dropout missing one or two credits or a recovered dropout who is missing many credits. Academic program customization is accomplished through the development of an IGP (Individual Graduation Plan) and a self-paced program based on a combination of technology (computer assisted instruction) and direct instruction. Choices among computer-based instruction program have also expanded, allowing districts and schools to select one or more programs best suited for their students.

- **Post-high school focus.** The goal of many current dropout recovery programs is to help the recovered dropout graduate from high school and get either a high school diploma or a GED. Emerging dropout recovery programs have shifted to a longer-term goal: getting recovered dropouts ready for post-secondary education or employment and assisting them in the transition. With the change of goal from high school completion to college and workforce preparation, dropout recovery programs promote graduation under the Recommended High School Program (over the Minimum High School Program) and de-emphasize the GED.

- **Collaboration with post-secondary institutions.** Emerging dropout recovery programs have a strong collaborative relationship with post-secondary institutions. Preparation for post-secondary education includes help with filling out applications, assistance in getting financial aid, trips to college campuses to see what it is like to be a college student, and taking the TABE or Accuplacer. More "advanced" college preparation programs allow students to take college

classes and earn college credit before graduation from high school.

- **Follow students in college.** The post high school focus these programs have is also manifested in following recovered dropouts into college. These programs want to know how their recovered dropouts are doing in college. The programs follow these students for at least one year in college. The close relationship between the dropout recovery program and the college makes this feasible.

- **Workforce preparation** is also a key component of the emerging practices. This is manifested in different ways, ranging from giving recovered dropouts job skills, connecting them to jobs while still in school; and providing them with Career and Technical Education (CTE) classes. Currently, most alternative high schools do not offer CTE classes on campus because of space limitations, lack of staff, costs of setting up a CTE program on the campus, and the exclusive focus on academics.

XVII. Ineffective Strategies

This chapter presents strategies considered not effective in the identification, recruitment, and re-entry of dropouts. The strategies are divided into two groups: (1) strategies that Texas school districts and charter schools with dropout recovery programs found not to be effective and (2) strategies identified as ineffective through the literature review of national and other state dropout recovery programs.

Strategies Identified as Ineffective by Texas Districts and Charter Schools

Texas districts and charter schools identified in the statewide survey a myriad of dropout recovery strategies that they have implemented and which have not proven effective in recovering students who dropped out. Please note that some strategies that have proven ineffective for some districts and schools may be effective in others. Strategies to identify, track, and re-enroll dropouts should be crafted based on a careful analysis of the factors causing students to drop out. Program evaluation activities should examine each strategy implemented to determine whether the particular strategy was effective—and if not, why not. For example, a phone bank recovery effort will not be successful if phone records are out of date. TAKS study groups may not be effective in reaching certain students if they are only offered during the daytime when many students work.

District and school administrative staff responsible for designing, implementing, and evaluating the dropout recovery program should be involved in identifying strategies that have been ineffective, determine why they were ineffective, and adjust their design to increase their effectiveness or eliminate them.

The dropout recovery strategies Texas districts and charter schools found to be ineffective are listed below under several categories.

Identifying and recovering students who dropped out:
- The advertising plan to recruit dropouts to come back was not implemented where dropouts live.
- Only sending letters to families and students who dropped out is ineffective; this strategy needs to be one among several strategies to persuade students to come back to school.
- Mass mail-out is ineffective because of dropouts' high mobility rate.
- Telephone contacts or interviews.
- Program does not have enough personnel to locate and recruit dropouts.
- Counselor communication with older dropouts is ineffective; they do not listen to the counselor.
- Locating dropouts through state agencies.
- Courts do not follow-up with dropouts who refuse to return to school.
- Parents are often powerless to persuade their children to go back to school.
- Using community volunteers to contact dropouts is less effective than using counselors.

- Parents liaisons have not been effective.
- Recovering dropouts who are mothers is difficult because they do not want to leave their babies in daycare or the father of their child does not want them to go back to school.
- Re-admitting all dropouts without regard to their attitude and motivation to finish high school.
- Forcing students into the program.
- Re-admitting students who still need to complete two years of credits has not been effective because it takes them a long time to complete the program.

Instructional setting:
- Placing recovered students back in the regular high school.
- Using a traditional education program.
- Non-flexible program or schedule.
- Night school was not successful because many students work at night or do not have transportation to get to school.
- Tutorials – students do not attend tutorials, do not attend after school or Saturday tutorials.
- Summer TAKS remediation program was not successful because students work or do not want to attend in the summer.
- Full-year program is of little interest.
- Older dropouts do not want to be in a program together with younger students.
- Sending students out of district to complete a program severs the relationships that students have with their peers and with staff.

Instructional program:
- Making the program's focus entirely academic.
- Offering a highly structured traditional program.
- Offering "too much" of an unstructured program.
- Poor materials.
- Lack of effective TAKS preparation strategies for students who failed Exit TAKS.
- Credit-recovery software program is impersonal and frustrating to students.
- Using a credit recovery software program that can be accessed only from school.
- Computer-based program: many students do not have enough self-discipline to complete modules or work independently.
- Self-paced program results in a high teacher-student ratio.
- Offering a complete at home online program.
- Offering career prep as an incentive.
- Lack of programs tailored to older students.
- GED Program that is not provided in the school.
- Dual credit program is of little interest.

Staff:
- Sharing staff with other campuses does not allow flexibility in scheduling.
- Sharing staff with other programs; need staff dedicated to the program.

Support services:
- Not enough services relative to student needs.
- Limited daycare services; daycare facility can not meet demand.

Strategies of National or Other States Dropout Recovery Programs Identified as Ineffective

Identifying ineffective dropout recovery strategies is as important as identifying successful practices. In general terms, dropout recovery programs that are too small, under-funded, and of low priority are ineffective (Steinberg & Almeida 2004).

Researchers warn that there are real dangers in proliferating alternative education programs. For example, as regular schools grow more academically rigorous and alternative programs proliferate, schools' "pushout" policies and practices may increase. It is therefore critical for districts and schools to think about the unintended consequences of their reform efforts and to ensure that students are the drivers of their educational pathways (Hoye & Sturgis 2005, Woods 1995).

Another concern with respect to dropout recovery and alternative education programs is the tendency for at-risk students to be put on an alternative "track" that makes it challenging for them to get back into a regular school (or, into college if they attain a GED instead of a diploma). Having an easy-to-navigate re-entry process is critical, particularly for students who are in foster care or those in and out of detainment facilities (Martin & Halperin 2006).

Dropout recovery programs developed based solely on a single or a few unstable (or potentially unstable) funding sources are in danger of shutting down if and when that funding source disappears (Hoye & Sturgis 2005, Weiler 1994, Harris 2006, Knepper 1988).

Also ineffective are early intervention practices that lack follow-up of student progress, teaching basic skills in isolation, providing work experience with no other social or academic intervention, increasing the number of attendance officers, and adding staff or programs to structures that are not functioning correctly to begin with (e.g., adding more of the same kinds of courses students are failing, making the school day longer) (Woods 1995).

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