

Proposal for Dropout Prevention Accountability Measures

Purpose: This proposal provides appropriate, meaningful and high quality accountability measures for dropout prevention and recovery high schools (referred to as “dropout schools”). These measures will provide a mechanism for ensuring that dropout students receive all the services and develop all the knowledge and skills they need to achieve postsecondary success and become valuable members of their community.

This proposal contains five major sections.

1. Background - A description of the students served by dropout schools.
2. Proposed Measures - A set of measures for evaluating the quality of dropout prevention high schools.
3. Current Report Card - A brief summary of the current accountability measures for dropout prevention high schools.
4. Why This Matters - A simple reminder of why dropout students need dropout schools
5. Case Studies - Real life examples of dropout student circumstances

1. **Background:** The Academy for Urban Scholars, and other similar dropout prevention high schools, serve “dropout students” that possess nontraditional backgrounds and sets of circumstances. We turn no student away and suspend and expel students in only very rare situations - less than 1% suspended for 10 days and only 2 students expelled over the past two years. All of our students know that we will not give up on them, and their ultimate goal of graduation.

Dropout students are characterized by both their lack of past educational progress and the competing demands on their time and resources. (See the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network at Clemson University and “Dropping Out” by Russell Rumberger for research and analysis.) These students are not simply “a little off track” and do not simply need “a couple of quick credits”, they face significant barriers in completing high school and preparing for adulthood. The accountability measures for evaluating the quality of the dropout schools serving these students should reflect the unique needs of these youth and appropriate expectations and timelines for them to achieve postsecondary success.

In general, dropout students re-engage in their education with a wide variety of missing knowledge, skills and habits (termed “gaps” in this proposal). We do not expect gaps like this from traditional high school students. In particular, of the 317 students at AUS that completed our NWEA MAP assessment for reading and math in the Fall of 2016, less than 29% demonstrated reading skills above the 5th grade level and less than 23%

Proposal for Dropout Prevention Accountability Measures

demonstrated math skills above that same level. The average grade level demonstrated by our students for reading was the middle of 4th grade and for math was the end of the 3rd grade. These results are very consistent with the more comprehensive assessments and analysis conducted as part of daily instruction by our classroom teachers.

In addition to these academic gaps, dropout students rarely possess personal situations that afford them the consistent and focused time that they should allocate to simultaneously closing past gaps, meeting traditional high school graduation requirements and preparing for postsecondary employment and educational opportunities. The Buckeye Community Hope Foundation (the Charter School Sponsor for AUS) recently compiled data for their dropout schools that indicated dropout students remain enrolled for approximately 2.3 years, on average (which we term a "2-Year Holding Period"). AUS, and many other dropout recovery schools and even some traditional high schools, employ several staff and expend considerable resources getting students engaged in their educational development. Approximately one-third of our dropout students are minors and receive intense truancy mitigation services from our Engagement Coaches. In addition to battling truancy, these engagement resources are dedicated to eliminating academic, domestic, behavioral and physical barriers, motivating students and establishing a realistic path for students to achieve postsecondary success.

Our experience over the past six years has confirmed that we must be extremely intentional and urgent in moving our students towards graduation. Our "2-Year Holding Period" for a typical dropout student leaves us little time for missteps or delays in preparing our students for graduation and their successful lives. We have proven that with a proper academic foundation and flexible postsecondary options, dropout students can progress to increasingly meaningful and successful careers to support their families and communities. In other words, they can reverse course from their dropout status, and all of its negative life implications, to a gainful and meaningful future.

The following proposals take into account the unique circumstances presented by dropout students bringing notable gaps and time constraints to their educational development. These proposals incorporate *strategic engagement* to keep students in a learning environment, *flexible learning* and pacing options to demonstrate competency and *incremental milestones* that enable dropout students to successfully develop their postsecondary careers while attending to their current educational development and life circumstances.

Proposal for Dropout Prevention Accountability Measures

In summary, "Our students typically have about two years to complete their twenty credits and state assessments, close up to five years of academic gaps and finish postsecondary preparations."

2. **Proposed Measures:** The terminology we use (strategic engagement, flexible learning and incremental milestones) reflect similar measurement categories to those identified by the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) in their paper titled "What Can states Learn About College and Career Readiness Accountability Measures from Alternative Education." The measures we propose below provide explicit and relevant evaluation data elements for the general categories within this popular AYPF structure.

A. Readiness to Receive Education (Strategic Engagement)

- *Reengagement (Enrollment Retention) - Do students stay enrolled?*
Enrollment is a clear requisite for achieving graduation and frequently reflects the wide array of efforts needed to eliminate the barriers dropout students face. Dropout schools must employ staff and expend other resources to get dropout students re-engaged and to keep them engaged through graduation. When students withdraw from dropout schools it's reasonable to assume they are very unlikely to earn their high school diploma and more likely to be incarcerated or dependent upon state assistance. ***Dropout schools should be measured by enrollment retention rates to gauge how well they keep students in an educational environment and progressing towards graduation.***
- *Attendance Growth Rates (Attendance) - Do students attend more regularly?*
Virtually all dropout students that re-engage with a dropout school have demonstrated very poor attendance patterns at their previous schools. Dropout schools must engage their students in consistent and appropriate attendance patterns. We recognize that dropout students, and their unique circumstances, often experience less-than-ideal attendance. However, attendance is critical to the success of our students. While attendance is necessary, it is not sufficient. Since dropout student have less-than-ideal attendance, they must be purposeful in keeping track of, and completing their graduation requirements. Our experience strongly indicates that dropout students must have personal contact and guidance to stay on track, complete their learning and understand the postsecondary options available to them. ***Dropout***

Proposal for Dropout Prevention Accountability Measures

schools should be measured by students meeting minimum attendance thresholds that ensure engagement and tracking of student growth.

- *Student Engagement (Work Completion Rate) - Do students complete lessons?*
The best way we have found for our dropout students to demonstrate purposeful engagement is by completing coursework. Our students have demonstrated a lack of progress achieving academic success when educated in the traditional model of staying at their desk for five or six hours each day for 180 school days. "Seat time" and "hours of learning opportunities" do not predict academic success for our dropout students. Attendance is important but completion of coursework, likely through a variety of means, is critical for them to progress towards graduation. We have found that our students progress better when they are engaged in completing coursework and receiving immediate feedback than when they are attending traditional classroom settings. This heightened focus on competency and work completion is also appropriate for the 2-Year Holding Period of dropout students. ***Dropout schools should be measured by student progress and competency on coursework as an interim measure towards course credits (sub-credits, unit lessons, modules or project completion rates).***

B. Demonstration of Learning (Flexible Learning)

- *Academic Credit Growth (Credits) - Do students show growth and earn credits?*
Students demonstrating competency and learning and earning credits towards graduation is the single best indicator of student progress at a dropout high school. Our experience clearly indicates this as the most accurate measure of student engagement, the most critical component of student tracking and the highest priority for all staff and students. ***Dropout schools should be measured by their ability to guide students to towards earning credits and demonstrating competency consistent with state standards and within reasonable time constraints.***
- *Indicators of Academic Progress - Do students achieve academic goals?*
The specified academic goals for dropout students will vary dramatically from one student to another. One student may arrive at age 19 with zero high school credits and 4th grade reading and math skills. Another student may arrive at age 16 with ten high school credits and 8th grade reading and math skills. The ultimate academic goal for all our students is graduation, which requires twenty credits and passage of state assessments. As mentioned in the previous section, earning credits and passing state

Proposal for Dropout Prevention Accountability Measures

assessments is the most important measure and highest priority for our students. In addition, we understand the impact of the typical 2-Year Holding Period for dropout students. ***Dropout schools should be measured by how well they set and meet appropriate goals for earning credits at a sufficient rate for their students to achieve graduation. Generally, this requires earning 3-5 credits every six months.***

- *Learning Gains (Adaptive Tests) - Do students make learning gains during the year?*
Adaptive tests designed to measure student growth, or learning gains, in the areas of reading and math can provide an independent and simple source for identifying academic gaps and validating gap closures. These tests also help our teachers customize their individual student instruction. We have found these tests to be less useful for students that have closed most of their academic gaps and are performing at a high school level. These tests are minimally predictive of student success on state assessments. In addition, they often fail to provide an accurate indication of student capability because getting students to try their best on the test can be challenging. **Dropout schools should not be measured by this testing metric for Report Card ratings. They should use the adaptive tests for identifying gaps, guiding instruction and validating gap closures.**

C. Readiness for College and Career

- *One-Year Graduation Rate - Do "Graduation Eligible Students" graduate?*
The appropriate definition for "Graduation Eligible Students" in dropout schools should be based on a prorated scale of credits and state assessments that still need to be completed. For example, a dropout student arriving in September that still needs five credits and one state assessment should be considered "Graduation Eligible" for the following May. However, a dropout student arriving in December that still needs ten credits and three state assessments should not, regardless of their age or state-identified cohort. As defined above, a reasonable pace for dropout students is earning 3 - 5 credits every six months. ***Dropout schools should be measured on one-year graduation rates for "Graduation Eligible Students" according to a reasonable definition of Graduation Eligible.***
- *Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness Measures - Are There Incremental Milestones?*
Dropout students must be offered reasonable steps towards postsecondary success and workforce readiness. Our experience suggests there are too many dropout

Proposal for Dropout Prevention Accountability Measures

students with simply too far to go in too little of time. Students with protracted life challenges and significant academic gaps simply should not be expected to progress from dropout to college ready status in the time currently afforded by dropout accountability measures. The traditional graduation requirements and college readiness expectations overwhelm too many dropout students and leave them without a reasonable path towards postsecondary success. ***Dropout schools should be measured by appropriate workforce readiness standards or community college placement assessments, depending upon the circumstances of individual students. Accountability measures should account for the time needed by dropout students to achieve their primary mission of graduation while acquiring industry certifications and other postsecondary options.***

- *Pass Rate on College Readiness Exam - Do students pass exams?*

As discussed above, dropout students need an appropriate amount of time and development to prepare for the full gamut of postsecondary options. At a minimum, we have found that our students can close the academic gaps necessary for above-minimum wage employment and that they can readily develop the skills necessary for employment opportunities requiring certifications and credentials. Community college entrance requirements provide an incremental milestone that may lead our students to ongoing postsecondary success. We also have AUS graduates that currently attend four-year universities and are thriving in that environment. Our students can achieve any level of postsecondary success but most of them need time and incremental steps along the way. A dropout school distinguishes itself by its ability to inspire and lead students to the highest level of postsecondary success possible. ***Dropout schools should be measured on the completion of employment and college readiness exams, including employment certifications or community college entrance exams.***

In summary, “dropout schools should be measured on student engagement, the rate of students earning credits, one-year graduation rates and employment or community college entrance exams.”

3. **Current Report Card:** The metrics in the current dropout school Report Card do not address the characteristics and experiences of dropout students and the schools that serve them. The current Report Card allows dropout schools some latitude or

Proposal for Dropout Prevention Accountability Measures

“wobble room” in their achievement levels for the categories of Exceeds, Meets and Does Not Meet. This latitude may enable some dropout schools to escape the consequences associated with the various rating categories but it does not address how poorly the current metrics measure dropout school quality. Below is a brief summary of why most of the current metrics are not appropriate for dropout schools and their students. (As a brief summary, this discussion does not attempt to capture the full analysis and calculations of the current report card, nor does it address the full array of dropout schools covered by the dropout report card.)

A. Test Passage Rates

This metric measures how well dropout students perform on state assessments. In particular and up until the spring of 2018, this has been a measure of results on the five Ohio Graduation Tests (“OGTs”). This is a reasonable metric and a critical component of the Ohio Graduation Requirements. For students expected to graduate in the spring of 2018 and beyond, the metric will be the results of the AIR End of Course exams, which is not a reasonable metric for dropout students.

This OGT metric becomes less reasonable when it is caught between the urgency of dropout students passing the tests to graduate and the reality of the time it takes dropout students to close the necessary academic gaps to pass the tests. The OGTs cover all the content and skills acquired over the previous four to six years of education. Our students need to close a lot of gaps from those years, which takes quite a bit of time, consistent focus and meaningful intervention strategies.

Consequently, we end up in a place where we are asking our dropout students to take the OGT because of when they started high school (state cohort). We ask students to attempt the OGT, regardless of whether they are academically ready, in the hopes that they might pass and move towards their graduation. This results in lower OGT “Test Passage Rates” than would be expected if we took the time to ensure that all students were fully prepared before they attempted the OGT.

B. Gap Closing

This metric is by far the least appropriate measure for dropout schools, especially those that serve low-income and minority students. The Gap Closing metric is intended to protect low-income and minority students by including them as a dedicated measurement category and holding their results to high standards. Well over 95% of our students are low-income and minority and their Report Card “Test

Proposal for Dropout Prevention Accountability Measures

Passage Rates” are already accounted for in the previous category, with reasonable goals.

According to recently released data, the state goals for Gap Closing pass rates on OGTs were 88% in Reading and 83% in math, in the student subcategories mentioned above. These goals are dramatically higher than the Test Passage Rates (discussed in the prior section) of 68% for an “exceeds” designation, and 32% for a “meets” designation.

Even if a dropout school earns “Exceeds” for a Test Passage Rate of 85% (well in excess of 68%), the school still does **not** meet the Gap Closing goal of 88%. This double counting and alternatively high goal is virtually insurmountable for most dropout recovery schools.

This current metric also includes a minimum participation rate requirement. Dropout schools are acutely aware of the importance of attendance and engagement and they extend considerable efforts in this area. Participation rates are important and directly impact graduation rates and overall student success; however, dropout schools ultimately have limited control over student participation on testing days.

C. Progress

The current dropout Report Card includes a metric for the evaluation of student gains during the school year. This metric has been adjusted from the traditional school report card measures to incorporate individual student growth. The dropout Report Card also includes metrics to ensure high rates of student participation in this additional external vendor testing requirement.

Again, AUS does not anticipate any challenges with meeting the standards of this metric and concurs with the importance of measuring student growth. (Over 97% of students tested in the Fall 2016 window and the average growth of subsequent testing in the Winter 2017 window has been above a positive 10%.)

Many consider this an inappropriate Report Card measure because students understand that their results on the assessment do not impact the credits they earn or their overall graduation. In other words, students might not take this test seriously enough for their results to be indicative or useful.

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Proposal for Dropout Prevention Accountability Measures

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We describe in more detail the limits, and some of the benefits, of the Student Gains metrics in the “Proposed Measures” section above.

D. Graduation Rates

The current dropout report card measures the graduation rate for all students that should have graduated within four, five, six, seven or eight years of their starting high school. AUS does not turn away any student regardless of when they should have graduated and how close, or far, they are from meeting their graduation requirements. Under this current graduation metric, a student arriving at a dropout school who should have graduated but has earned no credits counts the same as a similar student who has earned nineteen credits. Clearly, the dropout school must provide dramatically different services to support the development of each student.

Most dropout schools, AUS included, have tended to meet or exceed the expectations for this metric but that might be attributed more to where the benchmark is set than to the appropriateness of the metric. Graduation Rates are the most important measure for any high school. A school Report Card should measure the value added by the school in course credits earned and graduation results, taking into consideration the the credits needed by the students when they enroll at the dropout school.

We propose a more meaningful Graduation Rate metric in the “Proposed Measures” section above.

In summary, “the current dropout school Report Card measures include some reasonable and useful evaluation criteria but they do not provide appropriate and meaningful measures for the quality of dropout schools.”

4. Why This Matters:

Proposal for Dropout Prevention Accountability Measures

- AUS, and the other dropout schools we work with, are passionate about their mission to re-engage dropout students in an education that leads to graduation and postsecondary success. Most community members we meet consider dropout prevention and recovery efforts to be “noble work” and a “necessary challenge”. They also believe that the efforts benefit our communities and society.
- AUS produced a video that captures the impact dropout schools have on dropout students which can be see at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dn6WBnhTfUg>.
- We believe there are two key reasons why dropout schools matter and that most community members value their efforts.
 - **One** - The likelihood of dropout students graduating in a traditional academic setting is small and the downside of them never graduating is enormous. Many studies have proposed eye-popping costs, usually in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, associated with incarceration and welfare dependency. Without a high school diploma and useful postsecondary preparations, incarceration and welfare dependency are likely long-term outcomes for dropout students. Graduation alone affects a student’s potential earning power and mitigates many significant long-term societal costs.
 - **Two** - Re-engaging and recovering students, often children, that have “missed out” and “fallen into the shadows” is the right thing to do. Those of us in our community that enjoy lives of safety, success, well-being or affluence have an obligation to look out for those that do not enjoy such lives. Dropout schools are situated on the front lines of serving those in our community that do not currently enjoy safety, success or well-being. The students we serve often need an extra hand and usually a little extra time to reach that place in their growth and development where they can genuinely serve their families and communities.

5. **Case Studies:** The following three accounts reflect a range of experiences for actual students at AUS that we consider representative of the thousands of students we have served over the past six years and typical of the students served by other dropout schools.

- Student A (the disappointing case) - This young man started attending our school in October of 2015 at the age of 17. He joined us once or twice a week and would go through periods of more frequent attendance and then prolonged periods of minimal

Proposal for Dropout Prevention Accountability Measures

attendance. Similarly, he would go through phases of focus and diligence that suggested to his teachers that he was on his way to earning credits or passing state assessments. Eventually and after many battles over truancy, he was withdrawn from AUS. Ironically, he returned to AUS a couple of months later and attended school sporadically during the Spring of 2016. We did not see him again until November of 2016 when he and the mother of his son, also a student at AUS, re-enrolled with a renewed focus on earning credits and graduating. For both students, their attendance and behavior improved dramatically since their earlier enrollment at AUS. Many staff members showed a special interest in this couple and their new child by providing meals, diapers and transportation. However, at age 18, he still needed to earn 17 of his 20 credits and pass all 5 state assessments before he would be qualified to graduate, a steep mountain for anyone to climb. The mother of his child faced similar requirements. The next time I saw this student was in the local paper for his role as an armed robbery and murder suspect.

- Student B (the typical case) - This young lady started attending our school in the spring of 2013 at the age of 19. She demonstrated difficult and often aggressive behavior that would allow for her only productive learning context to be in very small groups for very limited time periods. She was gainfully employed but not sufficiently enough to support herself and a few family members with whom she shared housing. After several months and significant staff involvement, the school received documentation related to her special needs and official individualized education plan (IEP). This development further enabled AUS staff to customize her instruction and behavioral support. Over the next 6 - 8 months she attended school about twice a week for a few hours at a time and earned a couple of credits. In February of 2014 and after a prolonged period of less frequent attendance, she returned to the classroom with renewed gusto and focus. She was ready to graduate and move with her recently-discovered father to Florida to begin a new life. With just under four months until graduation day she still needed to earn six credits. She continued attending school more frequently (3 - 4 days each week) and seeking additional support from teaching and intervention staff. As an example of her focus, on several occasions she "walked away" from confrontations that in the past would have resulted in a major incident. She also displayed a rugged determination to complete courses that previously would have knocked her off track and kept her disengaged. She graduated in June of 2014 but her plans for a new life in Florida did not materialize. She returned to AUS a couple of times in 2015 to say hello and check on some of the other students with whom she still associated. She had not settled on college or meaningful employment that could move her forward in a successful career but she

Proposal for Dropout Prevention Accountability Measures

was grateful to have her high school diploma. Although this student falls short of the “college and career ready” description typically assumed for graduates, she is now much more capable of handling life and staying in the workforce. She is also better situated to progress through more career milestones with more education and training.

- Student C (the rewarding case) - This student attended our school relatively frequently and consistently for about two and a half years, graduating in the Spring of 2015. He did not pose many challenges to us during his time at AUS and usually demonstrated typical teenage behaviors such as laziness, sincerity, confusion, enthusiasm, goofiness, curiosity and distraction. On a couple of occasions, for about two months each time, his attendance dwindled and we wondered whether he would stop attending school. Eventually he returned to his more normal attendance habits and continued earning his credits and passing his state assessments. He possessed fewer academic gaps than most AUS students and was willing, most of the time, to work with his teachers to close those gaps while completing his normal high school coursework. Few of us were surprised when he graduated, but we were more surprised that he decided to attend a four-year university and live on campus. Some of our students had succeeded at four-year universities, but this student did not display the self-confidence or academic strength one might expect for graduating from a university. While working as an intern at AUS over the most recent holiday break, and after one and a half years of attending the university, he is maintaining a 3.7 GPA, participating in a variety of social organizations and looking forward to his graduation in 2019.



Policy Enhancements for Dropout Prevention and Recovery Programs

Townsend Community School (TCS or the School) has created a program that serves the individual needs of its at-risk students who may otherwise never attain a diploma. The School's program is rooted in its focus on developing strong student-teacher relationships that enhance student engagement and promote a personalized learning experience. One of the ways that the School does this is by breaking down the typical academic calendar and time constructs that can otherwise deter regular school attendance by at-risk students. Engagement is the primary goal of TCS, and its program is directly targeted at getting students who face substantial barriers to graduation to “buy in” to education, regardless of if they can still graduate on time or if they are eighteen years old with no high school credits.

TCS believes all schools should be held accountable for their academic programs. However, we recognize that the unique aspects of our program may impact our objective ratings negatively and inaccurately. With this in mind, and to ensure that schools are not disincentivized from working with students who need substantial supports late in their academic career, we propose the following:

1. Expansion of the definition of “at-risk” to include students over the age of fourteen.

At present, state law limits schools' ability to serve students who otherwise would qualify for being “at-risk” but are below the age of sixteen. Unfortunately, the age restriction that exists in current definition of “at-risk” students oftentimes requires students to fail up to two years of course work before they can enter a dropout prevention and recovery high school and receive the assistance that they need. Based on our experience, we believe that it is necessary to work with students who are at risk of not graduating as early in their high school careers as possible. Waiting until a student turns sixteen to provide our services increases the challenge to foster the engagement that is so crucial to the success of TCS and its students and shortens the available window of opportunity for students to “right the ship” towards on-time graduation.

2. Separate the meaning of “dropout prevention” and “dropout recovery” programs to more accurately reflect every schools curricular focus.

For many, the programming of dropout prevention and recovery schools is designed to specifically target only those students that are at risk of dropping out of high school, or who have already dropped out of high school and are returning to school in the hopes of recovering missed credits. Though ultimately the outcome of these goals are similar—i.e., aiding student to earn a high school diploma—they are not identical and require different strategies in order to be effective. Specifically, dropout prevention programs typically target students who are age 14 or older and high school ready, who have demonstrable indicators that they are at-risk of dropping out of high school or failing to graduate with their four-year cohort. Early intervention services for these students, particularly services designed to promote student engagement, are essential to preventing such students from failing to graduate. On the other hand, dropout recovery programs are generally designed to help students recoup missing credits or other graduation components in order to enable students' successful completion of high school. Rather than waiting for students to fail before

MEMO: Dropout Prevention and
Recovery Work Group
DATE: May 1, 2017
PAGE: 2

implementing intervention and recovery strategies, by separating the terms “dropout prevention” and “dropout recovery” the law would acknowledge that schools may serve one or more at-risk populations. Accordingly, the differences in these types of programs should be reflected in the way the state defines the terms “dropout prevention” and “dropout recovery” to more accurately reflect the reality of the demographics that each of these programs service.

3. Changing the nomenclature from “dropout prevention and recovery” to “pathway support programs.” As discussed previously during work group meetings, we believe including the term “dropout” in the legal name of our programs has a negative impact on both prospective and enrolled students. This term stigmatizes the quality of our programs as somehow less rigorous than other traditional pathways to graduation and calls into question the value of our students’ success in obtaining a high school diploma. As such, we propose referring to dropout prevention and recovery programs as “pathway support programs.” Although this may be a minor technical change, we believe ultimately it will avoid the negative connotations associated with such programs and help to foster engagement with students without alluding to the societal obstacles they face and the perceived shortcomings of their academic careers.

4. Tie graduation rate to include 22+ graduates who remain enrolled in the School upon turning twenty-two years old. In many cases, students enroll for the first time at TCS after they have already turned eighteen years old and are well short of the credits they need to graduate. Although we feel confident that we can help them build the required engagement and commitment to graduate, we often find ourselves up against the clock because they can only remain enrolled in our program until their twenty-second birthday. Recently, we have sought to use the 22+ program as a possible means of ensuring these students graduate by seamlessly transitioning students from one program into the other once the students “age out”—however, our successes in that regard are not accounted for in our graduation rates. As such, we propose that students who enroll in a dropout prevention and recovery program, and who remain enrolled continuously in the School through a 22+ offering, be included in the 8 year graduation cohort or, in the alternative, in an “overall” graduation rate.

5. Measure Student Progress considering both value-added and credits earned, and limit value-added data to those students enrolled for prolonged periods and taking mathematics and/or English Language Arts courses. The Student Progress component is a troublesome measure for our model. Because we refuse to turn at-risk students away, we oftentimes see a substantial increase in new enrollments throughout the spring months, meaning we have a limited window to develop necessary engagement and work towards the students’ credit recovery. Further, our students focus on one specific subject at a time to ensure they understand the material covered and promote better results, and generally self-select the order of courses taken in an academic year. This means that students who enroll during the year may be subject to assessments counted towards the School’s value added scores even though (a) the students may only have been enrolled for a few months, and/or (b) they did not take a mathematics or English Language Arts course during the academic year in which the assessment is being administered. As a result, merely viewing growth through the value-added lens may

MEMO: Dropout Prevention and
Recovery Work Group
DATE: May 1, 2017
PAGE: 3

compromise the report card rating of the School and fails to give an accurate portrayal to the public of the School's achievements.

For the reasons mentioned above, we do not feel the value-added scores accurately reflect the gains our at-risk students are making in our program. As such we propose the following changes to the Student Progress measure for dropout prevention and recovery schools:

- The Student Progress Component should consist of 50% of the average annual gain of "eligible student" NWEA MAP scores, and 50% of the average annual receipt of high school credits per academic year (with 5 credits being the equivalent of one year of growth). We believe that high school credits are worthy of stronger emphasis, as these actually measure a student's progress towards obtaining a high school diploma—which is ultimately the goal of dropout prevention and recovery programming. Student performance on courses aligned with state standards should carry substantial weight for the at-risk population.
- For value-added purposes, "eligible students" should be defined as students who have been enrolled in the program for at least six months during the academic year and have taken a mathematics or English Language Arts course while enrolled at the School. Without this limitation in place, dropout prevention and recovery schools would be held accountable for student growth in reading and mathematics when the School has only had limited access to the student and has not had the opportunity to provide instruction in the assessed subject areas.

In addition to the four points above, we would like to comment on current graduation standards and funding models. Generally, we agree that graduation standards for particular cohorts could be more stringent. However, we again note that our aim is to help every individual who walks through our door, even if over the age of 18, and even if they had previously been a "dropout" of another school or district. Older students who enroll with a small number of credits often have already failed to graduate with their four-year cohort. When this happens, our four-year cohort graduation percentage will decrease even though we have not spent any time working with this student, or simply because it is not a possibility to ensure they earn enough credits in a short period to graduate in four years. In essence, we are held accountable based on another school's or district's performance. Although we do not oppose the measurement of graduation by cohort, we do believe that this fact justifies keeping the applicable graduation standards at a reasonable rate. We also believe that greater emphasis should be placed on overall graduation rates, when we presumably have enough time to work with students to help them build up the necessary credits and engage in the curriculum.

In addition, although we are open to funding changes, we do not believe the funding structure should serve as another form of performance accountability. Our report card dictates our ability to remain in operation. However, tying funding to student performance could have the same result. As a community school, we already receive significantly less funding than our district counterparts, and making the receipt of such funding less predictable could obstruct our ability to make staffing and other important academic decisions.