

Ohio

The Superintendent's Workgroup on Dropout Prevention and Recovery Summary Report

July 6, 2017

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I. Executive Summary

The Superintendent's Workgroup on Dropout Prevention and Recovery was convened in November 2016 and tasked with making recommendations to the superintendent of public instruction regarding:

- 1) Improvement strategies for community schools that primarily enroll students between 16 and 22 years of age who dropped out of high school or are at risk of dropping out of high school due to poor attendance, disciplinary problems or suspensions;¹ and
- 2) Strengthening dropout prevention programs that serve youth at risk of dropping out of high school due to poor attendance, disciplinary problems or suspensions administered in traditional districts and community schools.

The workgroup was created to continue the work of the Community Schools Dropout Recovery Study Committee established by the 131st General Assembly in House Bill 2. The committee met during the summer of 2016 to study the definition of quality as it pertains to dropout prevention and recovery schools and the viability of a completion or competency-based funding model.

The committee recognized the complexity of the issues facing dropout prevention and recovery schools and at-risk students necessitated further discussion beyond the HB 2-required statutory deadline and recommended to the General Assembly that work continue in the form of a Superintendent's Workgroup on Dropout Prevention and Recovery Schools.

The workgroup broadened the discussion beyond the committee's original charge to take a comprehensive look at the needs of the system's most at-risk students, the evidence-based practices that promote dropout prevention and recovery and alternative program success, and the ways in which these schools and programs are supported through the Ohio Department of Education's continuous improvement system — the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP).

The recommendations outlined in this document require changes to Ohio Department of Education internal policy and practice, Ohio State Board of Education-approved administrative rules, and legislation to adopt and implement. The state superintendent of public instruction has full discretion to support or reject, promote, or disregard any or all recommendations as he deems appropriate.

The following report includes:

- I. Executive Summary;
- II. Process Overview;
- III. Final Recommendations and Workgroup Feedback;
- IV. Topics for Further Study;
- V. An Additional Item for the Superintendent's Consideration

¹ These schools are commonly referred to as dropout prevention and recovery schools.

- VI. Conclusion; and
- VII. Appendices: Design Considerations, Workgroup Members and Additional Recommendations from Stakeholders.

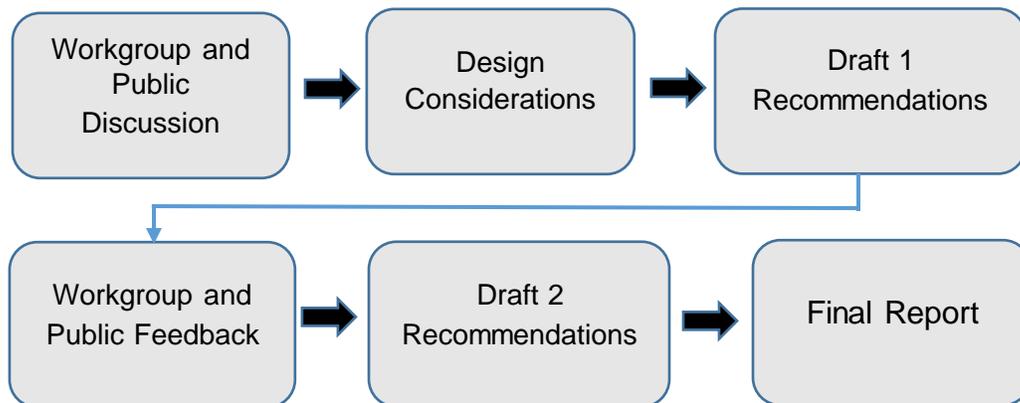
Recommendations for the Superintendent's Consideration

- 1) Any policy changes should maintain high expectations for students served in alternative education settings and should include a focus on both workforce and college readiness.
- 2) The dropout prevention and recovery label used in Ohio policy and statute should be changed to reflect a more positive view of alternative programs and schools to combat the debilitating stigma that affects students, parents, communities and teacher recruitment.
- 3) Two classifications of schools should be created – one for dropout recovery and one for dropout prevention.
- 4) Dropout recovery schools should serve students 16-21 years old exclusively, to receive the dropout prevention and recovery report card. Dropout prevention schools should serve students that face the same academic and socio-emotional characteristics of students in dropout recovery schools but exclusively serve students below the age of 16.
- 5) Schools should be held accountable for certain metrics aligned to engagement such as persistence (in attendance and course progress, etc.) and progress toward academic credits, as well as industry certificates and credentials. These metrics should be in addition to, and not replacing, academic performance metrics.
- 6) The graduation rate calculation for the report card should account for the credits dropout prevention and recovery students need to graduate. In many cases, a student enrolls in a dropout prevention and recovery school with a severe credit deficit and not enough time to attain those credits before the student is no longer eligible for a high school diploma from the school. Additionally, a shared accountability model should be considered in which the dropout prevention and recovery student's graduation outcomes should be shared with the student's home school, apportioned by the percentage of time the student spends in each school.
- 7) The Department should:
 - Seek to engage schools with a *support* rather than *compliance* focus.
 - Create a school support team that focuses exclusively on alternative programs and dropout prevention and recovery schools to promote evidence-based practices.
 - Provide guidance for wraparound service partnerships but work within the Department's capacity and recognize the value of locally-driven partnerships rather than state-sponsored initiatives.

II. Process Overview

The Superintendent's Workgroup on Dropout Prevention and Recovery met six times, beginning in November 2016. The recommendations in the previous section reflect the culmination of a comprehensive process that included stakeholder discussion, research and data, and a presentation from the American Youth Policy Forum that discussed best practices from around the country. Meeting topics included:

- Nov. 15, 2016: Reimagining Dropout Prevention and Recovery Programs
- Dec. 14, 2016: Options for Students At Risk and the Role of Dropout Prevention and Recovery Community Schools
- Jan. 11, 2017: Alternative Education Models: American Youth Policy Forum
- Feb. 23, 2017: Defining DOPRs, Draft Design Considerations
- March 23, 2017: Revised Design Considerations, Alternative Funding Models
- April 27, 2017: Recommendations for the Superintendent



Workgroup meetings featured robust discussions with members, guests and members of the public. Design considerations (see Appendix A) were synthesized by Department staff members based on workgroup discussions, feedback collected during the committee meetings, supplemental data and research, and additional comments from the public. The draft design considerations were reviewed during the Feb. 23 workgroup meeting and feedback was incorporated into a final draft. The design considerations informed **Draft Recommendations** that were put before the committee on April 27 for discussion and feedback.

III. Final Recommendations and Workgroup Feedback

The following section lists the **final recommendations** accompanied by the associated **draft recommendations** presented to the workgroup and public on April 27 and the **feedback** received on each draft. The final recommendations incorporate the feedback received during the meeting.

Recommendation 1

Any policy changes should maintain high expectations for students served in alternative education settings and should include a focus on both workforce and college readiness.

Draft: Any policy changes should maintain high standards for students served in alternative education programs and dropout prevention and recovery schools.

Feedback: A majority agreed with this idea but suggestions included being clearer about the use of “high standards.” Members also suggested to incorporate workplace/career/college readiness.

Recommendation 2

The dropout prevention and recovery label used in Ohio policy and statute should be changed to reflect a more positive view of alternative programs and schools to combat the debilitating stigma that affects students, parents, communities and teacher recruitment.

Draft: Dropout prevention and recovery schools should be renamed to more accurately capture their value and reduce the stigma currently associated with the label.

Feedback: There was general agreement on this idea, with specific suggestions to reference students not wanting to be “labeled” as dropouts.

- The question was raised about whether dropout prevention and recovery schools include “Dropout” in their names. The suggestion was made that this is most likely an internal issue in the way these schools are referred.

Recommendation 3

Two classifications of schools should be created — one for dropout recovery and one for dropout prevention.

Draft: Lower the age in the defined definition of eligible students for dropout prevention and recovery schools to 14-years-old. *Note: Recommendations 3-5 were discussed simultaneously.

Feedback: The group generally agreed that the focus on prevention is very important and schools that target certain age ranges have a greater likelihood of success. A large age range, as members expressed, makes serving all students more complicated. Few dropout prevention and recovery schools, according to several members, are equipped to do so.

- The workgroup did not come to a consensus on whether the age should be lowered but felt strongly that the option of having two types of schools — one for dropout and one for prevention — that serve different age groups, should be considered.

Recommendation 4

Dropout recovery schools should serve students 16-21 years old exclusively to receive the dropout prevention and recovery report card. Dropout prevention schools should serve students that face the same academic and socio-emotional characteristics of students in dropout recovery schools but exclusively serve students below the age of 16. (This recommendation combines two draft recommendations.)

Draft: Significantly increase the required percentage of students above 16 years old (14, as recommended) for schools seeking the dropout prevention and recovery report card. The transition should be gradual — a year of planning, 75 percent in the second year and 90 percent in the third year and beyond.

Feedback: First, while 14 is an important developmental age, concern was expressed that the developmental difference between 14-year-olds and 21-year-olds may be too great. Second, a number of members raised the concern over school districts funneling poor performing students to dropout prevention and recovery schools as a way of removing them from the districts' report cards. By lowering the age, system abuse could grow, as there is more potential for overidentification of eligible students for dropout prevention and recovery schools.

- A participant suggested an additional category for a hybrid model that would provide prevention services for students ages 14-16 and who are not yet behind and a recovery service for students ages 16 and above who have dropped out or are severely behind.

Draft: Schools that serve fewer than the required percent of students above the eligibility age may still receive dropout prevention and recovery report cards if they agree to display performance data on the report cards in a clear and visible way similar to traditional districts and other community schools.

Feedback: There was consensus to significantly increase the requirement to meet dropout status. The requirement of 90 percent has support, but members suggested an additional examination of the impact the change would have on dropout prevention and recovery schools.

- Participants, however, raised some concern over the use of percentages due to the fluctuation in attendance. A school's dropout prevention and recovery status can fluctuate if the percent of eligible students in the school changes each year; however, schools cannot turn away students who have demonstrated risk factors. Schools could, as one participant noted, turn away students based upon age, depending on the law.

Recommendation 5

Schools should be held accountable for certain metrics aligned to engagement such as persistence (in attendance and course progress, etc.) and progress toward academic credits, as well as industry certificates and credentials. These metrics should be an additional metric and not replace academic performance metrics. (This recommendation combines two draft recommendations.)

Draft: Schools should be held accountable for certain metrics aligned to engagement such as persistence (in attendance and course progress, etc.), performance benchmarks and steps toward industry certificates and credentials.

Draft: The school's or program's ability to provide work-focused experiences such as internships or other job opportunities for students should be factored into school performance measures on the report card.

Feedback: Participants agreed with measuring improvement and allowing schools to attain credit for it. There must be a recognition that the difficult, chaotic personal situations many students often have has an impact on school success. One participant suggested credit earned/progress attained should be included in a report card measure.

- The group generally expressed concern that dropout prevention and recovery schools receive no credit or recognition for helping students improve to the point of returning to their home schools or traditional districts.
- The suggestion was made to include an additional measure rather than replacing a current measure to ensure student performance outcomes, and not just inputs, are included on the report card.
- A number of challenges were raised regarding this idea that reflected potential barriers to success.
 - As one participant said, without additional funds, it is difficult to support internships, job coaches or other staff needed to ensure job opportunities.
 - Dropout prevention and recovery schools are often on career center waiting lists rather than being a priority; therefore, providing access for credentials is challenging.

- Job readiness skills do not, according to one participant, necessarily come only through work-based experiences. Work-focused experience doesn't have to be a paid job. It could be job shadowing or something similar.
- One participant suggested requiring a workforce component is too prescriptive. *School choice* means parents and students can decide what works best for them.

The group agreed to the concept but recommended more discussion on this issue.

Recommendation 6

The graduation rate calculation for the report card should account for the credits dropout prevention and recovery students need to graduate. In many cases, a student enrolls in a dropout prevention and recovery school with a severe credit deficit and not enough time to attain those credits before the student is no longer eligible for a high school diploma from the school. Additionally, a shared accountability model should be considered in which the dropout prevention and recovery student's graduation outcomes should be shared with the student's home school, apportioned by the percentage of time the student spends in each school.

Draft: The graduation rate measure should be tied to a tiered intake process by which students are categorized by their requirements needed to graduate.

Feedback: The group agreed this could be a promising idea in concept but settled on the idea of proposing shared responsibility in which the home district and the dropout prevention and recovery school would be held accountable for the success or failure of a student in proportion to the time that student attends the schools.

Recommendation 7

The Department should:

- **Seek to engage schools with a *support* rather than a *compliance* focus.**
- **Create a school support team that focuses exclusively on alternative programs and dropout prevention and recovery schools to promote evidence-based practices.**
- **Provide guidance for wraparound service partnerships but work within the Department's capacity and recognize the value of locally driven partnerships rather than state-sponsored initiatives.**

Draft: The Department should:

- Develop guidance for wraparound service models that engage community and government resources to better serve the whole student.
- Partner with stakeholder entities, as well as sponsors, to provide guidance and training as needed to promote high-quality instructional practices that address the needs of all learners in these programs.

- Include dropout prevention and recovery schools in the school improvement process and modify the current system, where necessary, to ensure all schools are effectively supported.

Feedback: Ideas as presented were generally opposed. Participants expressed concern that the Department did not have the capacity or ability to provide the necessary guidance.

- Partnerships, as one participant said, will not last long if they are Department driven. Wraparound services are most successful when the community has bought into the practice
- A suggestion was made that the Department's role could be to provide resources and best practices, but the Department working in local districts is not the best use of resources.

Additional suggestions included:

- The Department serve as the broker bringing different agencies to work in concert at the state level; however, the Department should not be the provider of services.
- The Department could sponsor a third party that works on the ground with the schools; in which case, the Department would serve as a broker. Services should be provided by experts.

IV. Topics for Further Study

The committee identified two topics requiring further study: 1) Defining students served by alternative programs; and 2) An alternative funding model for dropout prevention and recovery schools.

1) Defining students served by alternative programs:

The following draft recommendation was discussed by the workgroup, but no consensus was reached.

Draft: Students Served by alternative programs should be clearly defined. Risk factors should be reflected in the definition of students served to better differentiate support. Students must meet the age requirement and exhibit at least two of the following risk factors to be placed in an alternative program or admitted to a dropout prevention or dropout recovery school:

- Economic Disadvantage;
- Parenthood;
- High Mobility;
- Low Commitment to School;
- Homelessness;
- Limited English Proficiency;
- High Mobility/Family Disruptions;
- Poor Performance on State Tests;
- Severe Trauma;
- Grade Retention/Age-for Grade;
- Severe Behavioral Incidents;

- Chronic Absenteeism.

A student also may be placed in an alternative program, dropout prevention or dropout school at a parent's request, if the student meets the age requirements for the program or school.

Feedback: There was general agreement that the definition of students served by dropout prevention and recovery schools warrant further refinement.

- One participant argued that no definition should cause schools to wait to provide additional support. Requiring that a student only be allowed to enter a program after a school-based trigger, such as retention, could be very detrimental to the student. Parents, according to the participant, should have the option of looking for better situations for their students whenever they think it best.
- Districts, according to one participant, do not have an incentive to serve kids who are not making it. The advocacy of the parents of high-achieving schools is too great to put resources into the lower-performing students. Serving the lower-performing students, participants argued, will have a negative impact on districts' graduation rates due to the length of time it may take some of these students to graduate.
- Participants stated that there will continue to be inconsistency in the application of the definition because of local interpretation. A school-based trigger for a severe disciplinary action, for example, will be very different in one school environment than it might be in another.
- Investment/professional development for teachers who are in charge of these students might be lacking, and teacher recruitment continues to be a problem.
- Participants suggested that the requirement for students to exhibit risk factors in both categories should be removed from the definition and there be just one list.
- A participant also suggested the list might serve as a recommendation for local districts rather than a mandate or specific requirement.

2) Also for further consideration: An alternative funding model for dropout prevention and recovery schools

The general principles for an improved, more aligned and completion-focused funding model were discussed over the course of the workgroup; however, concrete recommendations warrant much deeper study. The workgroup identified critical elements that serve as a firm starting place for future discussion. A funding model may include:

- Compensation for case management services as supported by evidence-based practices for working with at-risk students.
- Payment aligned to student progress, *with student progress* defined by graduation and other forms of transition and advancement.
- The inclusion of "Transition" and "Graduation Eligible" designations that account for where students are in relation to graduation.
- Consideration of a tiered payment system based on student need — perhaps, similar to other systems such as special education.
- A system similar to the higher education formula that accounts for a student's background, baseline funding for operational support and incentives for student progress.

V. An Additional Item for the Superintendent's Consideration:

Although the workgroup did not discuss Ohio Administrative Code 3301-16(D)(2), it is suggested that the Department review the code to assess the potential graduation requirement impact and whether the Ohio Administrative Code aligns with the statute. The Department should propose an amended rule for the State Board of Education's consideration if the current rule does not align with statute.

Ohio Administrative Code 3301-16-04(D)(2): College and work ready assessment transition

The Ohio Administrative Code reference states:

((D) Students in dropout prevention and recovery programs.

(1) Students enrolled in a dropout prevention and recovery program described in division (F) of section 3313.603 or section 3314.36 of the Revised Code who entered the ninth grade for the first time on or after July 1, 2014, shall meet the requirements of the college and career ready assessment system.

(2) The students described in paragraph (D)(1) of this rule are not required to take any end of course exams required under division (B) of section 3301.0712 of the Revised Code.

VI. Conclusion

The report to the superintendent is submitted against a backdrop of federal and state regulatory uncertainty and acknowledges the inherent limitations therein. Nevertheless, the report and the workgroup's work during the previous six months reflect an important step forward in Ohio's commitment to better serve the state's at-risk students.

"Dropping out of school," according to the National Dropout Prevention Center, "is the result of a long process of disengagement that may begin before a child enters school." The workgroup approached its work from a systematic point of view and has attempted to propose recommendations for which policy, evidence-based practices, and stakeholder experience and feedback have been considered. This work must continue, and the recommendations captured in this report should serve a foundational role.

For further information, please contact Buddy Harris, (614) 728-7731 or Buddy.Harris@education.ohio.gov.

VII. Appendices

Appendix 1

Design Considerations

The design considerations captured by the non-workgroup members served as the basis for the policy recommendations listed in Section I and directly reflect the feedback received during workgroup meetings. The design considerations are as follows:

- Dropout prevention and recovery schools work with some of the most challenging student populations and must address the needs of the whole student;
- Personal relationships and mentoring are critical to at-risk student success;
- Dropout prevention is just as important as dropout recovery, and interventions should be available for all, regardless of age;
- Schools should use evidence-based practices for working with each student;
- Successful programs provide job skills and link students with professional opportunities that could lead to careers;
- Parents, teachers and the community should be made aware of how well a school serves all children — including students below the age of 16;
- Successful programs personalize education and allow self-pacing;
- The way the schools are labeled impacts perceptions and teacher recruitment;
- A diploma earned at a dropout prevention and recovery school must mean the same thing as a diploma earned at a traditional school (and should be counted the same in the eyes of postsecondary institutions);
- Credentials, certificates course completion etc., should be accounted for in calculating a dropout prevention and recovery school's success.

Appendix 2

Workgroup Members

The members of the workgroup were appointed by the state superintendent of public instruction. The workgroup was comprised of:

Chad Aldis	Thomas B. Fordham Institute
Andrew Brenner	Ohio House of Representatives
Michael Carter	Sinclair Community College
William Couts	Mound Street Academy
Stewart Jesse	Glass City Academy
Eric Gordon	Cleveland Public Schools
JaNice Marshall	Cuyahoga Community College
Peggy Lehner	Ohio Senate
Stephen Lyons	Columbus Partnership
Jennifer Merritt	Mahoning County High School
Brenda Haas	Ohio Department of Higher Education

Additional school leaders were asked to participate as friends of the workgroup to offer additional perspectives. Those leaders included:

Steve Vanderoff	Rushmore Academy
Mike DeCenzo	Central Ohio ESC
Harold Brown	(formerly of KnowledgeWorks)
Pete Barkowiak	Townsend Academy
Jason Morton	Flex High School

Various other school leaders and stakeholders attended one or more meetings. The members were typically asked to participate in the discussions along with members of the workgroup.

Appendix 3

Stakeholder Proposals

Several stakeholders have submitted additional proposals for the superintendent to consider. The submissions are included in their entirety [here](#). If you would like to submit additional recommendations, please email Buddy Harris at Buddy.Harris@education.ohio.gov.