

TIPS from Seven Key Principles

FACTS ON DROPOUT PREVENTION

The Principal's Role in Dropout Prevention: Seven Key Principles by Rebecca and Steven W. Edwards^{1*} outlines how principals may engage in dropout prevention, as follows:

Principle #1 — Identify Students Early Know who is statistically most likely to drop out of school.

When examining dropout statistics, an awareness of the following is paramount: disabilities, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, past retentions, transfer rates, ESL students, and single-parent families.

Principle #2 — Examine New & Existing School Policies/Procedures Carefully consider the impact of new policies on students.

Prevent dropout by ensuring that school policies are supportive of student success. Closely examine policies in light of student needs. **Reevaluate existing policies.** For instance, consider the “C rule.” Many schools require students to maintain a C average to be eligible for athletics or cocurricular programs. On the surface this policy makes sense—it is meant to raise student academic achievement and hold students accountable—but how do you know if these policies

are meeting students’ needs?

Use a cohesive system to collect and track data.

The following techniques may help to examine existing policies to ensure student success:

1. *Perception Data* – Data directly from students in regards to how they feel about existing policies.
2. *Demographic Data* – Data collected on variables such as age, gender, or ethnicity.
3. *Student Assessment Data* – Data on how well students are performing on classroom tests or informal assessments by teachers.
4. *Data on School Processes* – Data on strategies/practices, programs, and initiatives at other schools.

Principle #3 — Build Community Partners & Personalize School Identify and access all available resources in the community.

Invite multiple school and community stakeholders to support dropout prevention, including:

- Law Enforcement* — to develop relationships with students.
- Probation* — to build partnerships with adult and juvenile probation.
- Youth Service Agencies* — to provide links to services such as youth and children counseling agencies.
- Local Colleges & Universities* — to recruit student mentors.

Personalize school so students are connected to a caring adult.

Consider personalizing your school by:

- Eating lunch with students to communicate that they are worth your attention.
- Greeting students at the door as they enter or exit the school.

Hire staff that connects with students.

Hire teachers who look for creative and multiple ways to connect with students, including eating lunch with students or creating after-school programs.

Consider teaming and looping

Teaming and looping follows a two-year model of learning. Students and teachers are connected in the same courses for two-years.

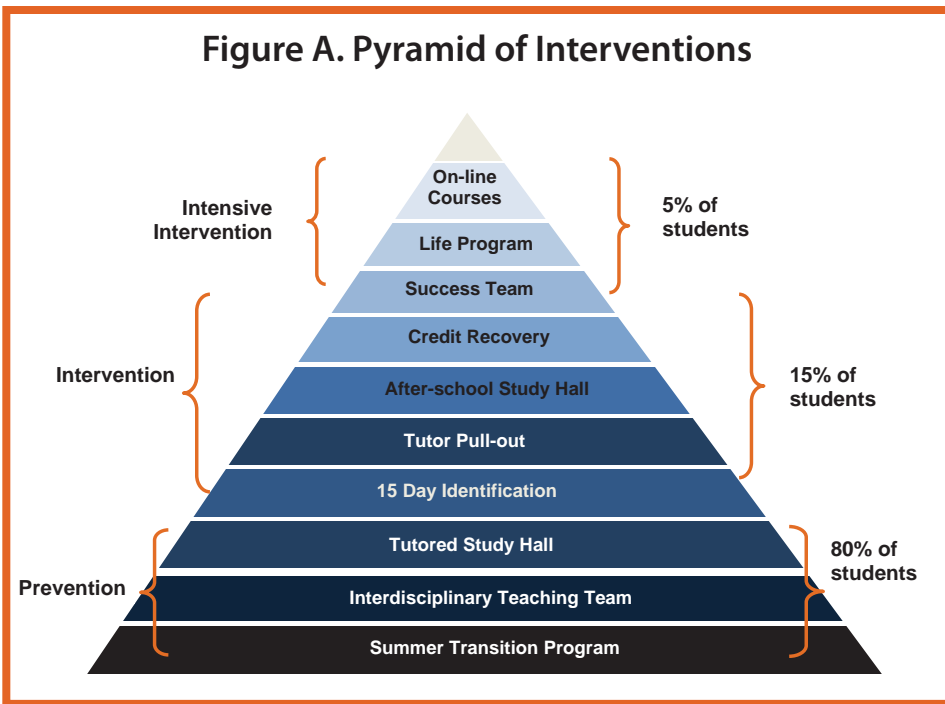
Principle #4 — Reduce Social Isolation Expose students to diverse, positive cultural opportunities.

Most students at risk are taken to visit local jails and detention centers. However, these students are better served through exposure to opportunities that show alternative views of society, such as plays, cultural exhibits, and local colleges. There is more power in exposing students to positive influences.

Partner with the community.

Community/local businesses may

Figure A. Pyramid of Interventions



provide internships, job shadowing, and mentoring opportunities.

Provide service opportunities.

Community service and service-learning projects build connections between students and community.

Principle #5 —

Manage Transitions **Anticipate challenges.**

The transition from middle school to high school can be a difficult one, especially for students at risk.

Establish a committee.

A group of faculty from sending and receiving schools may meet during the year to share information and develop support systems.

Create programs.

Programs allowing identified at-risk students to develop teacher relationships may prove beneficial.

Link students with advocates.

Teachers may serve as **faculty advocates** who monitor at-risk students before, during, and after transition. Enlisting **student ad-**

vocates may help at-risk students during times of crisis and serve as a point of contact for students.

Principle #6 —

Create Options/Implement Creative Interventions

View exclusion as a last resort.

Rather than viewing exclusion as a solution, school leaders must focus on establishing a climate where children and youth feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to adults.

Evaluate current initiatives.

You may start that consideration with questions such as:

- What are the intended outcomes of the program?
- What population does each initiative serve?

Use a pyramid of interventions.

Remember that one size does not fit all when it comes to education. Consider creating a pyramid of interventions (*see Fig. A*) that includes tutored study halls, credit recovery, or shortened instruction.

Create academic and nonacademic interventions.

Students who are impoverished, formerly incarcerated or starting families benefit from interventions such as a school-based health center, day care, and other mental and medical services. They may also benefit from reexamination of cocurricular activities, which often need adjusting to their lifestyles.

Principle #7 — **Build Parent/Family Relationships** **Recognize link between parent involvement and dropout.**

Low parental involvement is an indicator that a student is more likely to dropout. Involve families of at-risk students in school through effective communication and meetings with parents.

Maintain frequent, regular communication with parents.

Structure meetings with parents to focus on positive outcomes. Identify students who are in highest risk categories and hold parent conferences prior to each school year.

Make first connection with parents a positive one.

Schedule shorter “benchmark meetings” regularly throughout the year. Establish these meetings as either neutral or positive—not negative.

If parents can't or won't come to you, go to them.

Make reaching out to parents a priority, especially to parents of at-risk students. Use focus groups held at community venues such as churches and community centers.

Seven Key Principles may be ordered at: www.dropoutprevention.org/pubs and clicking on “Effective Strategies.”