



Zero Dropouts for California

Information, Analysis, Recommendations,
and
Compendium of Resources
on the
Dropout Issue and Educational Practices in California
California Department of Education

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Executive Summary

Many publications discuss the issue of dropouts in the United States and California. Research suggests that the problem of dropouts is rooted in many factors, any one or several of which might result in a student dropping out of school. For one student it might be family instability or poverty; for another, disengagement with school; for a third, it might be insufficient choice of school subject matter that could inspire the student or an inadequate match between student learning style or needs and available school options. In addition, the persistent achievement gap among defined groups of students results in many of those students finding themselves falling further and further behind until high school completion seems hopeless.

The dropout phenomenon remains stubbornly high, and it will take bold measures to remedy it. Though difficult to precisely quantify, the dropout rate evidently persists at about 15 percent to 30 percent of the population of students, with the greatest danger of losing students in the early years of high school.

Dropping out impacts not only each student's future, but society as well. The cost of students dropping out is substantial, especially when calculated over the projected lifetime of the student. Studies indicate that **each year's class of dropouts** has a net cost to the nation of \$200 billion during their lifetimes, in terms of lost earnings and unrealized tax revenue (Hale 1998). This amount does not factor in the significant costs for increased social and law enforcement services.

A new study, *The High Cost of High School Dropouts: What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools*, released in January 2007, indicates:

- Each high school dropout costs the nation approximately \$260,000 over his or her lifetime.
- With an estimated 12 million dropouts over the next ten years, the loss to the nation could be \$3 trillion.
- If the class of 2006 students who dropped out had graduated, the economy of the United States would have seen an additional \$309 billion in income over the lifetime of the students.
- If all California students in a graduating class were to graduate, California's economy could see an additional \$36 billion over the lifetime of the students in that graduating class.

What Can Be Done?

Two major problems that California must resolve are dropouts and the achievement gap. A "zero dropout" program inherently addresses the enormous gap between those who complete high school and those who do not. Evidence within the body of research

suggests that certain educational practices may have a positive effect on reducing the number of dropouts. It must also be emphasized that the dropout problem must be **systematically** addressed at the state, district, and county level with a high degree of commitment if dropout rates are to be reduced. The system must encompass prevention, intervention, recovery, and retention to be productive. Practices that show positive results include:

1. Providing students with schools and instruction targeted to their learning styles and holding students, schools, and districts accountable for achievement.
2. Preparing individualized student learning plans and following or refining them.
3. Conducting early and persistent evaluation of student progress and engagement in school and addressing problems as they arise.
4. Establishing a greater range of personalized schools, including smaller high schools (with enrollment of about 400 students).
5. Recognizing that expansion of choice for the student is at the heart of the solution to dropouts, including:
 - a. District-level commitment to providing every student with educational options that work for that student.
 - b. Choice of schools, especially among those emphasizing certain subject themes.
 - c. Availability of schools offering career education in a field that is relevant to the student.
6. Enhancing parents'/guardians' involvement in their students' learning and strengthening community collaborations and partnerships that redefine the position of the school within the community.
7. Implementing a coordinated district-wide system for student transition and retention.
8. Sustaining strong district-wide communication about student performance.

What Is Currently Available in California and What Is Needed?

The State of California supports an array of educational options ranging from those that offer students a different approach—such as alternative schools of choice, charter schools, independent study, career technical academies, themed schools, and magnets—to those focused on intervention for students who are at high risk of dropping out. The educational options for dropout prevention, intervention, recovery, and retention include continuation schools, community day schools, county court schools,

county community schools, and opportunity education. Associated programs include Senate Bill (SB) 65 programs, after school programs, tenth-grade counseling, foster youth programs, and others. Counties and districts also run specialized programs to prevent/recover dropouts.

A recent Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) report, *Improving Alternative Education in California*, recognizes that 10 percent to 15 percent of California's high school students enroll in educational options programs each year. Based on 2006–07 enrollments, this equates to 199,000–299,000 students. These at-risk, dropout-prone students often encounter educational techniques designed to keep them in school. Yet many students leave school before these programs can help them. In many cases the availability of these programs is too limited. The effectiveness of these programs requires further study and needs to be measured with improved accountability practices.

California has a tremendous opportunity to develop a new systemic approach to the dropout problem. Coordinating, building on, and strengthening existing high quality programs throughout the California Department of Education (CDE) and expanding educational options and school choice are essential. Dropout prevention, intervention, recovery, and retention programs function to keep at-risk students in school, help them re-engage in education, and enable them to earn their high school diploma. The range of programs offers a last chance for some students, but for even more students who are potentially at-risk these programs offer the best chance to remain engaged and succeed in school.

Recommendations

While there is no instant cure to the dropout problem, a coordinated approach intended to reduce the dropout rate over time has the greatest possibility of being effective. Such an approach must emphasize prevention as well as address intervention, recovery, and retention.

Recommendations for the State

1. Establish a policy of “zero dropout tolerance” that includes interventions aimed at supporting youth development and achievement, preventing dropouts, recovering dropouts, and closing the achievement gap.
2. Provide sufficient funding and a fiscal system that will ensure districts and counties plan and provide a coordinated array of educational options for all students.
3. Hold local educational agencies (LEAs) accountable for their at-risk students and the results of their educational options programs and schools, with a goal of “zero dropouts”.

4. Support the preparation, recruitment, and continuing professional development of teachers and administrators who are effective in serving at-risk populations.
5. Fund comprehensive research to reconcile the wide disparity in reported dropout rates and accurately identify dropout characteristics that are unique to California student demographics.

Recommendations for Districts and County Offices of Education

1. Develop a dropout prevention and graduation plan that systemically addresses the dropout problem at the LEA level and increases LEA accountability.
2. Provide individual student assessments of learning needs and progress, individualized learning plans for all students, and sufficient counseling. Utilize assessment data to improve instruction.
3. Ensure that every student has educational options available that function well for that student. Offer a range of instructional and school choices that effectively provides students with options that match their individual needs and learning styles and promotes student achievement.
4. Support students through a committed partnership of schools, families, service providers, community members, and parent/guardian involvement.
5. Improve the monitoring of students' placement and enrollment as they transfer between schools/programs/LEAs.

Recommendations for the California Department of Education

1. Develop a comprehensive statewide policy for dropout prevention, intervention, recovery, and retention and establish it as a State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SSPI) priority goal: That all students receive the educational options they need to ensure completion of a state standards-based kindergarten through grade twelve education and earn a high school diploma.
2. Propose/sponsor legislation supporting dropout prevention, intervention, recovery, and retention, including requiring comprehensive district plans that encompass a range of educational options for students, individual learning plans, expanded counseling for at-risk students, and funded pilot programs.
3. Improve dropout communication and assistance by establishing a "Dropout Central" program to research and disseminate information about effective, pragmatic, and transportable practices that show results. Provide greater technical assistance and leadership in developing model programs and promising practices.

4. Improve alternative schools accountability and assist districts and counties in accurately collecting and reporting dropout statistics.
5. Encourage extensive high school reform and the expansion of educational choice including specialized secondary schools, small learning communities and schools, independent study, online education, and other initiatives and evaluate their success.
6. Designate the CDE's dropout prevention, intervention, recovery, and retention programs as among the highest priorities and devote appropriate authority and resources to comprehensively address the problem.

Essence of the Problem

"Understanding why students drop out of school is a difficult if not impossible task because, as with other forms of educational achievement, it is influenced by an array of individual and institutional factors. Nonetheless, a review of the theoretical and empirical literature does yield some useful insights into the nature of this problem and what can be done about it. First, dropping out is not simply a result of academic failure, but, rather, often results from both social and academic problems in school. Second, these problems often appear early in students' school careers, suggesting the need for early intervention. Third, these problems are influenced by a lack of support and resources in families, schools, and communities. These findings suggest that reducing dropout rates will require comprehensive approaches both to help at-risk students address the social and academic problems that they face in their lives and to improve the at-risk settings that contribute to these problems" (*Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis* 2004).

Who Drops Out?

Jay Greene, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, and subsequent researchers around the country have placed the national graduation rate at anywhere from 64 percent to 71 percent. It is a rate that most researchers say has remained fairly static since the 1970s (Thornburgh 2006).

The following are factors that may increase a student's risk of dropping out and illustrate a major element of the achievement gap:

- Socioeconomic status. Students from families in the bottom fifth of the socioeconomic ladder are four times more likely to drop out than students from families in the top two-fifths. Black and Hispanic youth with the same family income and educational background are no more likely to drop out than their White peers, but Black and Hispanic students are overrepresented in the bottom fifth of the socioeconomic ladder (Almeida 2006).

- Ethnicity. Nationwide, only about half of the Black, American Indian, and Hispanic students graduate in comparison to three-quarters of the White and Asian students who graduate. California closely mirrors the national statistics with only 68.9 percent of all students graduating. Rates by racial groups are as follows: Asian 82 percent, White 76 percent, Hispanic 57 percent, Black 55 percent, American Indian 50 percent. The ten largest districts in California have widely varying graduation rates, with Oakland at 30 percent and San Juan at 81 percent. In Los Angeles and San Bernardino City, the rates were below 50 percent (Swanson 2004).
- Repetition of a grade. Repeating a grade, including in the lower elementary grades (*Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis* 2004).
- Student Mobility. Moving, both in residence and between schools (*Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis* 2004).
- Family Situation. Single parent or step-families, parent's/guardian's unemployment, and lack of parental involvement.

However, the U.S. Department of Education observed in 2000 that a substantial proportion of dropouts are **not** from broken homes, **not** poor, and **not** pregnant (*Essential Tools* 2004). Engagement and attachment with school and its programs are also critical factors.

Why Do They Drop Out?

Interviews with dropouts "...do not reveal the underlying causes of why students quit school, particularly those factors from long ago that may have contributed to students' attitudes, behaviors, and school performance immediately preceding their decision to leave school. Moreover, if many factors contribute to this phenomenon over a long period of time, it is virtually impossible to demonstrate a causal connection between any single factor and the decision to quit school. ... A number of theories have been advanced ... dropping out as part of the larger phenomenon of student achievement... theories come from a number of social science disciplines—including psychology, sociology, anthropology and economics—and identify a range of specific factors related to dropping out" (*Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis* 2004).

Improving High School: A Strategic Approach, prepared by the LAO in May 2005, cited a 2004 report by the National Research Council which synthesized available research on the problems of urban schools, including low achievement and school dropouts. Key points include:

- "Dropping out of high school is for many students the last step in a long process through which students become disengaged from school."

- “The seeds of disengagement usually are planted long before high school. Years of poor performance in elementary and middle schools can lead students to conclude that ‘school is not for them.’ This leads to low expectations for their own success in school and, consequently, low effort—a vicious circle of sorts that results in declining achievement.”
- “Enthusiasm for school can wane when students do not see a connection between their course of study and their post-high school goals.”

What Are the Kids Saying About Dropping Out?

The Silent Epidemic (Bridgeland and others 2006), a study funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, was released in March 2006. The most surprising finding of the Gates survey was just how few dropouts report being overwhelmed academically. “Fully 88 percent said they had passing grades in high school. Asked to name the reasons they had left school, more respondents named boredom than struggles with course work” (Thornburgh 2006).

Reasons students give for dropping out include:

- Disengagement (i.e., no one cares; uninteresting, irrelevant classes; no real-world connection)
- Academics (i.e., boredom, low grades, failing classes, not academically prepared for high school curriculum, too far behind, unable to keep up or make up school work)
- Financial responsibilities
- Pregnancy and parenthood
- Caretaking responsibilities
- Suspension and expulsion

Warning signs include:

- Poor attendance (skipping classes or school)
- Struggling or failing academically
- Little parent involvement

“Students see dropping out as a viable option, whether or not they understand the consequences in terms of personal costs” (Yazzie-Mintz 2006).

Costs of Dropping Out

There is a growing body of research providing cost-benefit analyses of what happens when students do not complete high school. The results point to the conclusion that we cannot afford to continue to lose these students.

Economic Implications of Dropping Out

Income/Tax Revenues

- “Each year’s class of dropouts will have a net cost to the nation of over \$200 billion during their lifetimes in lost earnings and unrealized tax revenue” (Hale 1998).
- Dropouts “earn only half as much annual income as a high school graduate by the time prime working age is reached, while the likelihood of living in poverty is nearly three times higher for high school dropouts than for those who finished high school” (Hale 1998).
- “Twenty years ago, almost 90 percent of high school dropouts could find regular work. Today, only slightly more than a third of young dropouts find full-time employment and only 11 percent are earning more than poverty wages” (“K–12 Dropout Prevention” 2003).
- The earning gap between high school graduates and dropouts is widening, reflecting the growing demand for technological and other higher level skills, both in newly developing occupations and in occupations that were previously open to those with only very basic skills.

Incarceration

- Dropouts represent nearly half of the prison population.
- It costs \$70,000–\$80,000 annually to incarcerate a youth, \$40,000–\$50,000 to incarcerate an adult. This does not include the costs to victims of their crimes.
- Incarceration cost savings add up to half a million dollars for ten years for each youth who is prevented from substantial crime.
- Generally, prisoners do not contribute to tax revenues.
- Economists estimate that a 1 percent increase in high school graduation rates would save the nation as much as \$1.4 billion each year in crime-related costs.

Welfare

- There are tremendous costs to states from the increased welfare burden due to dropouts' higher rate of unemployment.
- Dropouts comprise nearly half of the heads of households on welfare.

Dependence on Public Health Care

- Dropouts are far more likely to be unemployed, or if employed, to receive inadequate or no health care coverage.
- Dropouts are likely to have poorer health, less likely to have adequate medical coverage, and more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors.

Multi-generational Impact

- Life opportunities and future earnings for the offspring of dropouts are also dramatically curtailed (Losen and Wald 2005).

Positive Economic Implications of Dropout Prevention and Recovery Programs

- Continuing higher attendance rates (short and long term) of dropout-prone students after leaving a specialized intervention program, compared to expected attendance (and dropouts) if they had not had this intervention.
- Lower absentee rate (and lost base funding) of other students in traditional schools when disruptive students are transferred to an educational options school and/or improve their behavior within the traditional school setting.
- Lower absentee rate of teachers in traditional schools (and cost of substitute teachers) when disruptive students are transferred to an educational options school.
- Increased attendance rate of other students when students return from educational options schools to traditional schools and serve as positive role models for other disruptive students.
- Reduced vandalism and crime.

What Works to Keep Kids in School?

Dropout prevention is an ongoing process that includes prevention, intervention, recovery, and retention of students who may be at risk of not completing their

educational goals. Some models and practices exist that are promising methods to help remedy the dropout problem. However, programs are not automatically replicable or transferable; it is vital to understand the context and situation in which they are applied.

The primary emphasis should be on preventing students from dropping out, focusing on those students at greatest risk. The National At-Risk Education Network (NAREN) identifies quality facets of at-risk education programs. The NAREN Nine facets are:

1. Accelerated academic curriculum
2. Strong literacy component
3. Deliberate self-management program
4. Personalized curriculum
5. Project-experiential-work orientation
6. Smaller school and class size
7. Solid planning and administrative support system
8. Collaborative community model
9. Comprehensive staff development program

More information is available at <http://www.atriskeducation.net/certification/index.html>
[Note: the preceding URL is no longer available].

The LAO report, *Improving High School: A Strategic Approach*, cites the following key features of programs that work:

1. An Academic Push

A focus on teaching and learning that “does whatever it takes” to increase the academic skills of students. Giving all students what they need to learn, holding them accountable, and providing extra assistance when needed. This focus on success sometimes requires changing teachers’ instructional approaches to educating low-achieving students. Holding students accountable includes consequences for failing to complete required work, strong school attendance, and truancy programs.

2. Early Attention to Low Performance

Studies show that student motivation declines as students move through elementary school to middle and high schools. Thus, it makes sense to address the achievement problem before high school, when students are more engaged and when academic deficits are smaller.

3. More Personalized School

More personal, supportive schools create an environment which encourages lower-performing students to engage in school.

- A school climate that promotes the belief that all students can learn and feel socially connected with the school.

- Smaller schools, where students have more personal interactions with teachers and other adults who can help resolve family or personal problems.
- High, but achievable, expectations of student academic achievement.
- Innovative instructional settings that employ suitable online and other technologies that attend to the learning styles of today's students.

4. A Greater Range of Options

Giving students and parents/guardians greater control over choice of programs and schools aligned with student goals and learning styles.

- “Create Alternative High Schools. A choice of learning environments can help kids who are struggling in regular schools” (Thornburgh 2006).
- Support Career Technical Education. Many dropouts never see the connection between school and later life. Career technical education gives students real-world skills and makes it clear that the job of being a student is preparation for future work.

5. Parent/Guardian Involvement

Parents/guardians must be partners with schools. All students need encouragement, support, and sometimes, externally imposed discipline to keep them on track in school.

What Do the Kids Want?

Information from interviews with students who dropped out, from *The Silent Epidemic*:

- “Improve teaching and curricula to make school more relevant and engaging and enhance the connection between school and work.”
- “Improve instruction, and access to supports, for struggling students.”
 - Three-fourths wanted smaller classes with more individualized instruction.
 - 70 percent believed more tutoring, summer school and extra time with teachers would have improved their chances of graduating.”
- “Ensure that students have a strong relationship with at least one adult in the school.”

What About Recovering Dropouts?

Whatever It Takes: How Twelve Communities are Reconnecting Out-of-School Youth (Martin and others 2006), by the American Youth Policy Forum, highlights several promising programs and arrives at the following observations to reconnect young people with education:

- “The large majority of out-of-school youth have been impeded not only by poor prior schooling, but also by social, economic, and psychological barriers to effective learning. To become successful adults they need multiple supports.”
- “Beyond question, youth must acquire literacy, numeracy, and communication skills to be adequately prepared for adult life.”
- “Effective dropout reconnection efforts are comprehensive, youth-centered, flexible, intentional, pragmatic, and inclusive of extensive post-graduation follow-up.”
- “Young people want to learn and succeed.”
- “Service to others and to the community is a key element of many dropout recovery efforts.”
- “Committed adults, steadfast in their support of young people’s success, are the key element of dropout recovery.”
- “Language is an important consideration in the world of dropout recovery. Many respected leaders in that world conspicuously shun such descriptors as ‘dropouts,’ ‘at-risk youth,’ ‘kids,’ ‘alternative education,’ ‘nontraditional school,’ and ‘second chance program.’ Rather, they view their work as redefining what effective education and youth development really can and should be.”
- “School districts must take responsibility for all of their young people and show leadership in reaching out to disconnected youth.”
- “Many practices prevalent in successful ‘alternative’ and ‘second-chance’ education programs should be adopted by the ‘first-chance’ system to improve student retention and academic success.”
- “While charter schools evoke passionate, often negative, reactions in many educational circles, their flexibility and adaptability make them increasingly popular among nonprofit, community-based organizations dedicated to reconnecting out-of-school youth to the mainstream.”

Recommendations

Summary Recommendation

All students should have the best chance for success, including access to quality personnel, courses, curriculum, materials, technologies, instructional time, working space, provisions for special academic interventions, and other services necessary to achieve educational goals and graduate from high school with appropriate mastery of the state standards.

What is “quality” and suitable for one student may be inappropriate or ineffective for another, so it is vital that a complete range of educational options is made available to all students. All options must be equally rigorous in terms of student achievement.

Recommendations for the State

1. Zero Dropout Tolerance Policy

- a. Recognize that the most fundamental achievement gap is that which exists between those who finish high school and those who do not.
- b. Establish a policy of “zero dropout tolerance” aimed at (1) supporting youth development and achievement, including immediate and appropriate intervention when negative behavior emerges and/or academic failure/falling behind occurs; (2) preventing dropouts; (3) recovering dropouts; and (4) ending the achievement gap. The interventions must be those most likely to support the academic, social, and emotional development of youth, as well as their safety.

2. Funding

- a. Provide funding to support increased instructional and supervision time, including the use of school facilities and other facilities to accommodate extended days, weekends, and split schedules to provide for students enrolled in educational options programs and settings.
- b. Include funding to serve students in special education, English-language learners, students with special needs, pregnant and parenting students, and students with learning challenges.
- c. Financially support the unique one-time start up costs that may occur when a district or county office establishes new educational options schools and programs.
- d. Establish a reasonable formula to fund additional costs of off-site services and/or facilities for educational options schools and programs, including

coordination with community services such as probation, mental health, and treatment programs.

- e. Conduct a comprehensive fiscal analysis of alternative education to ensure that program needs are supported by adequate fiscal resources.

3. Establish Local Educational Agency Accountability

- a. Hold LEAs accountable for all of their at-risk students.
- b. Hold LEAs accountable for the results of their educational options programs and schools.
- c. Initiate a monitoring system for LEAs to examine their effectiveness in implementing and sustaining effective educational options programs and achieving positive results.

4. Educators and Professional Development

- a. Support the preparation, recruitment, retention, and professional development of teachers, support staff, and administrators who are effective in working with at-risk students and their families.
- b. Teacher and administrator preparation and credentialing programs and professional development programs must include training in instructional strategies that result in achievement in at-risk populations and in how students become motivated and resilient.
- c. Require that teacher and administrator credential programs cover educational options, similar to the required coverage of special education. Large numbers of students, at some point during their educational careers, transfer between traditional and educational options schools and programs. Just as with special education, cross-program articulation and collaboration are undermined by limited knowledge, stereotyping and myths, and different administrative structures.

5. Dropout Rates

- a. Fund a comprehensive research review to reconcile the wide disparity in reported dropout rates by schools within districts and counties (including adult education and corrections programs), by school districts and county offices of education, by the state of California, by private and public research studies, and by national reporting agencies.
- b. Arrive at a realistic calculation that includes dropout rates by grade, age, gender, race, language group, socioeconomic status, and additional demographics such as foster care placement, citizenship/immigration status, pregnant/parenting, sexual orientation, homelessness, juvenile and

adult criminal justice system involvement, district and county office funding levels, school size and class size, student-to-teacher ratios, teacher qualifications, and other variables to be determined.

- Exercise care in differentiating between the findings and conclusions of dropout prevention research that uses national demographics as opposed to findings and conclusions of dropout prevention research that uses the demographics that are specific to California. Public policy for California must be based on the unique diversity of the state population and not generalized on the basis of national demographics.

Recommendations for Districts and County Offices of Education

Sustained district accountability for all students who begin their high school career in the district must be a feature of state/district policy.

1. Dropout Prevention and Graduation Plan and Accountability

- a. Districts and county offices of education should develop a local dropout prevention and graduation plan to serve students at risk of not completing their K–12 education and graduating from high school. The plan should include district responsibility for all at-risk students and provide learning support for those students.
 - Learning support should include community partnerships and links to support services for students and families that address the underlying causes of barriers to learning.
- b. Districts must be accountable for exhausting all opportunities to address the needs of at-risk students, including the selection and modification of programs and strategies, full application of the agency's resources, and full participation in state accountability programs.
 - Establish coherent relationships between types of schools and educational placement options, including county schools, to identify gaps in providing an array of educational options that provide an adequate match between the learning styles and needs of all students.
 - Propose, track, and evaluate strategies for filling gaps.
- c. Adopt a dropout prevention model (e.g., Student Success Team) that ensures a timely response to the needs of students in crisis and prevents students from dropping out.

- Programs within traditional schools should provide high-risk students with all possible interventions prior to assignment to a separate school such as community day schools, continuation high schools, or county community schools.
- d. Establish a district-level assessment, placement, and evaluation process.
- The process should include meetings attended by a district educational options coordinator, administrator from the referring school, administrator from the receiving school, and other appropriate staff such as counselors or other support staff. The meeting should be student-focused and identify goals, supports needed, individual learning plans, and potential placements. Students and/or parents/guardians may also attend these meetings. A plan for monitoring student success in the selected placement must be established with regular follow-up meetings to evaluate and modify supports as needed.

2. Individual Assessments, Counseling, and Data

- a. Provide individual assessment that effectively matches student needs to available resources in a timely fashion.
- b. Provide each student with an individual learning plan that addresses student motivation factors that lead to empowering students to be highly engaged and resilient as needed for the student's individual situation.
- c. Determine student improvement by measuring (1) academic achievement in relation to state standards; (2) social skills, such as conflict resolution; (3) skills indicating emotional maturity, such as taking personal responsibility for the consequences of one's behavior; (4) cognitive skills, such as using good judgment in making decisions; and (5) student motivation based on student perception of the relevance and value of the educational experience.
- d. Expand guidance and counseling support services and involve school and community counseling programs and services, including providing counseling related to social and emotional development, as well as course selection.
- e. Use assessment data to improve instruction.

3. Educational Options

- a. Ensure that every student has appropriate educational options available to them.

- b. Support different learning modalities and instructional styles that may benefit students that learn in non-traditional ways, creating optimal teaching and learning environments for students who have not succeeded in the traditional classroom, including classroom delivery based on research on resiliency and student engagement, not only academic content.
 - c. Offer instructional strategies within a flexible time schedule as long as state minimum requirements and student needs are met.
 - d. Offer a range of school and program choices that correlates with student learning styles and improved achievement, including and expanding on-line programming.
4. Community Support and Parent/Guardian Involvement
- a. Ensure that a committed partnership between schools, families, service providers, and community members is established for students to achieve academic, social, and emotional health and success in school and in their personal lives.
 - b. Expect all parents/guardians or other adults, including mentors, responsible for a student identified as being at risk of failure to participate in education and support service activities and provide a means for them to participate.
5. Monitoring Students' Placement
- a. Improve monitoring of students' placement and enrollment as they are assigned to transfer between schools and LEAs. For example, if a student is assigned to transfer from one school district to another school district or a program operated by a county office of education, track and confirm that the student has, in fact, enrolled in and is attending the next school. Conversely, when a student who has been transferred leaves that school, the school district that made the original referral must be informed. Too often students assigned to transfer never arrive at the next school and drop out with neither LEA doing any follow-up.

Recommendations for the California Department of Education

1. Develop a Comprehensive Statewide Policy
- a. Develop a comprehensive statewide policy for dropout prevention, intervention, recovery, and retention and establish it as a SSPI priority goal: That all students receive the educational options they need to ensure completion of a state standards-based grade kindergarten through twelve education and earn a high school diploma.

Since the dropout issue is a complex problem, a coordinated policy approach is essential. Effective solutions will most likely involve the Legislature, Governor, State Board of Education (SBE), CDE, county offices of education, school districts, other governmental agencies, and non-governmental entities of many types to the extent that they are directly concerned with the education system and its products. A systemic view of the problem and its causes can inform the CDE and the SBE in establishing policy, proposing and implementing solutions, and, if needed, legislation. Closing the achievement gap among all students should be a key element of this policy.

When reviewing current policies and practices, the CDE and the SBE should identify those policies and procedures that may cause students to drop out or that fail to address causal factors for which external agencies and organizations are responsible.

- b. Include dropout prevention, intervention, recovery, and retention as a priority goal of the CDE. The CDE should publicly commit to a leadership role in advocating that district and county office of education policy is best served by providing a complete range of educational options as a critical component of equitable access to a high quality education and closing the achievement gap for all students.

Strong advocacy for California's at-risk students is needed. It is estimated that approximately 400,000-500,000 elementary, middle, and high school students are served by educational options programs each year, including up to 15 percent of all high school students. These programs must have adequate support in counties and districts. Sufficient resources, including technical assistance, administrative oversight, and meaningful financial support, must be provided to adequately support effective dropout prevention, intervention, recovery, and retention programs, thereby ensuring successful outcomes for participating students and generating high expectations for these programs.

Students in at-risk programs have often carried a "less than" stereotype. Too often the at-risk student is blamed for academic failure when it is the delivery system that is at fault. Moreover, public policy research in education is essentially silent on alternative education issues.

Public policy and CDE philosophy in support of special education programs over the years clearly demonstrates that assertive advocacy on behalf of unique student needs can be successfully achieved. The CDE must be strongly supportive of educational options programs.

- c. Foster working together in collaboration: county, district, and school staff; CDE staff; community organizations; legislators; mental health and social services; probation; and community based organizations.

2. Propose/Sponsor Legislation

- a. Require school districts to create and implement a comprehensive plan for dropout prevention, intervention, recovery, and retention that ensures every student receives appropriate educational services leading to high school completion and graduation.
 - Require early identification and intervention programs, beginning in elementary school.
 - Recognize that the early years of high school are an especially critical time to address dropout tendencies.
- b. Require each student to have an individual learning plan.
- c. Expand counseling services to ensure all at-risk students receive appropriate and sufficient counseling and guidance.
- d. Revise funding for the Pupil Retention Block Grant. While this block grant provides flexibility for expenditures and program development, it also creates a ceiling where districts must balance the establishment of new efforts by cutting other programs.
- e. Fund and support a defined number of pilot programs and schools to systematically attack the dropout problem. These pilots should be based on CDE guidelines with explicit goals, reporting requirements, and evaluation components. Include funding for an evaluation of educational outcomes of the pilot programs, including recommendations based on that evaluation. Coordination and support for private sector efforts such as the Alternative High School Initiative may be an element in this strategy.

3. Improve Dropout Communication and Assistance

- a. Establish a “Dropout Central” program to improve communication between schools, districts, counties, CDE, students, parents/guardians, and the public about the dropout problem and to highlight effective practices and resources to address it.
- b. Establish and fund an outreach program to districts and counties within the CDE to encourage a systemic approach to the problem of dropouts, including helping districts develop an appropriate range of educational options that will allow districts and county offices to expand the choices available for students.
- c. Increase support to LEAs by providing more technical assistance, networking, proactive program administration, and leadership in establishing quality schools and developing model programs and promising practices in the 11 county superintendent regions.

- d. Convene a CDE-sponsored statewide dropout prevention conference that brings together all stakeholders to assess, plan, and launch a new era of effective dropout prevention, intervention, recovery, and retention.
4. Improve Alternative Schools Accountability and Dropout Statistics
- a. Undertake a revision of the Alternative Schools Accountability Model to make district and school efforts more measurable and comparable and to incorporate dropout rates with accountability.
 - b. Work internally and with schools, districts, and counties to accurately report dropout statistics (by grade, age, etc.), including dropouts in kindergarten through grade eight that are often overlooked.
5. Encourage High School Reform
- a. Encourage extensive high school reform and expand online education, specialized secondary programs, smaller learning communities, and a range of schools and programs that address the needs of all students and promotes and evaluates their success.
6. Prioritize Dropout Prevention
- a. Declare dropout prevention and reducing the dropout rate a priority.
 - b. Request every appropriate CDE office/division to identify ways they can be involved in the retention and engagement of students to prevent dropouts. (See Appendix A for a list of CDE programs).
 - c. Designate a dropout prevention lead at the CDE and provide resources to coordinate all CDE programs, offices, and divisions identified as closely connected to dropout prevention, intervention, recovery, and retention.
 - d. Coordinate the CDE programs designated to close the achievement gap with dropout recovery and retention. This is essential as the two are inextricably linked.
 - e. Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to close the high school completion achievement gap, reduce dropout rates, increase dropout recovery, and increase the retention of dropouts to ensure completion of a high school diploma.

The Place of Charter Schools

While not specifically addressed in this paper, charter schools exist as another educational option that may work to prevent dropouts. Charter schools offer a public choice option to local communities. Charter schools may provide parents and students

with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system. Charter schools generally provide small, personalized learning environments specially tailored to their clients and may encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods.

California Department of Education Programs Available to Students at Risk of Dropping Out A Preliminary List

The following tables are reasonably complete, however, not all programs may be included.

Programs: Voluntary Enrollment	Funding	Number of Schools/Districts	Number of Students	General Information
Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) (Prevention)	Grant: 2006–07: \$7,735,000 First year of a three-year funding cycle; available only to the existing grantees.	2006–07: 11 regional centers; about 2,700 sites	2006–07: 120,000	Provides a college preparatory program for students in the middle who are often economically disadvantaged and underachieving. Enables disadvantaged secondary students to succeed in rigorous curricula, enter mainstream activities in school, and increase their opportunities to enroll in four-year colleges.
Adult Education (Recovery, Retention)	Federal Workforce Investment Act. State adult education funding.	347 Adult Education Centers (CDS Directory)	N/A	Provides basic literacy through high school diploma and General Educational Development (GED) programs for adults.
Alternative Schools and Programs of Choice (Prevention, Intervention, Recovery, Retention)	General Fund based Average Daily Attendance (ADA).	N/A	N/A	Accommodates student needs, interests, and learning styles to foster student engagement and high achievement.

Programs: Voluntary Enrollment	Funding	Number of Schools/Districts	Number of Students	General Information
<p>California Partnership Academies (CPA)</p> <p>(Intervention, Retention)</p>	<p>Grant:</p> <p>2005–06: \$22,999,000 2006–07: \$23,490,000</p> <p>No funding for new California Partnership Academies is available, only annual funding for the 290 currently operating programs.</p> <p>Recipient amount: up to \$81,000 per academy or \$900 per student for up to 90 students.</p> <p>\$40,000–\$81,000 grants awarded based on program implementation level of currently operating academies. The remaining balance may be issued in one-time grants per the 2006 budget.</p> <p>Performance based: only those students meeting the 80 percent attendance and 90 percent credit requirements qualify for funding.</p> <p>Local businesses and school districts each provide 100 percent match through direct and in-kind support of all funds granted by the CDE.</p>	<p>2004–05: 286 academies in 208 high schools in 105 school districts</p> <p>2005–06: 281 academies in 203 high schools in 103 districts</p>	<p>2003–04: 34,810</p> <p>2004–05: 33,028</p> <p>2005–06: 33,573</p>	<p>Effective school-business-district partnership, providing integrated academic and career technical instruction to students who are at risk of dropping out of school or not motivated by traditional curriculum. The CPA model, a school-within-a-school, for grades ten through twelve, establishes viable partnerships with the business or public sector or both. Emphasis is placed on student achievement and program accountability.</p> <p>At least one-half of each class is at risk of academic failure.</p> <p>Most academies consist of 100 plus grades ten through twelve students.</p>

Programs: Voluntary Enrollment	Funding	Number of Schools/Districts	Number of Students	General Information
Charter Schools (Prevention, Intervention, Recovery, Retention)	Federal Charter Schools Grant Program. Grants. General Fund ADA.	2005–06: 517 schools 2006–07: 539 schools	2005–06: 196,846 2006–07: 222,266	Public schools that may provide instruction in any of grades kindergarten through twelfth that are created or organized by a group of teachers, parents, community leaders or a community-based organization.
Diploma Plus (Intervention, Retention)	Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, through CommCorp: \$1,000 per student over three years. General Fund ADA. Ongoing operational funding will be the responsibility of each school program, community, school district, or organizational sponsor.	2 schools chosen June 2006 2 schools chosen June 2007	150–400 per school	Expanding the Diploma Plus network of small schools to California. Serves students 15 years of age and older who have not reached their potential in a traditional secondary school setting and are at risk of not graduating from high school. Provides students with high academic standards and career development to support a meaningful vocational and academic future. Performance-driven high schools that serve students in two-to-four or more years of educational services.

Programs: Voluntary Enrollment	Funding	Number of Schools/Districts	Number of Students	General Information
<p>Early College High School</p> <p>(Intervention, Retention)</p>	<p>Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.</p> <p>Local district funds.</p>	2005–06: 19 Early College High School Campuses in California	2005–06: 2,740	<p>Improves high school and college graduation rates of students, especially students who historically have lower than average graduation rates.</p> <p>Small, autonomous schools (up to 400 students) that blend high school and college into a coherent educational program. All students can achieve two years of college credit at the same time as they are earning a high school diploma (within four-to-five years of entering ninth grade).</p>
<p>Home and Hospital Instruction</p> <p>(Prevention)</p>	<p>General Fund ADA</p> <p>(1 hour = 1 ADA)</p>	N/A	N/A	<p>Maintains instructional continuity during a student's temporary disability that makes attendance in regular day classes or an alternative education program inadvisable. Goal should be maintenance of student's former level of performance while recovering. Parent's/guardian's responsibility to notify school district of residence of student's presence in qualifying hospital.</p>

Programs: Voluntary Enrollment	Funding	Number of Schools/Districts	Number of Students	General Information
Independent Study (Prevention, Intervention, Recovery, Retention)	General Fund ADA.	2004–05: 1,373 schools 2005–06: 1,401 schools 2006–07: 1,455 schools Charter and non- charter schools, grades kindergarten through eighth and ninth through twelfth	2004–05: 109,021* 2005–06: 107,650* 2006–07: 113,893* Over 20,200 graduates met high school requirements through independent study.	Alternative instructional strategy. Students work independently, according to a written agreement and under the general supervision of a credentialed teacher or teachers.
Magnet Schools and Programs (Prevention)	General Fund ADA. Federal funding for some magnets.	2004–05: 464 schools 2005–06: 519 schools 2006–07: 336 schools	2004–05: 188,872* 2005–06: 197,847* 2006–07: 127,111*	Programs in schools or in an entire school chosen by students/parents/guardians. Many reflect a district strategy to achieve racial and ethnic balance by offering special opportunities in curriculum and instruction, generally with the benefit of federal funding.

Programs: Voluntary Enrollment	Funding	Number of Schools/Districts	Number of Students	General Information
Middle College High Schools (Intervention, Retention)	General Fund ADA. Community Colleges Chancellor's Office.	2005–06: 11 schools	2005–06: 1,126	Accommodates the needs of students at high risk when entering high school, promoting success. Small alternative high schools on community college campuses.
Morgan-Hart Class Size Reduction (ninth grade) (Prevention, Retention)	Apportionment: 2005–06: \$110,185,000 \$192 per course per student, to a maximum of two times the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) ninth grade enrollment if two courses are implemented. 2006–07: \$102,000,000 \$204 per course per student, to a maximum of two times the CBEDS ninth grade enrollment. 2007–08: \$106,621,000 \$213 per course per student, to a maximum of two times the CBEDS ninth grade enrollment.	2004–05: 736 high schools; 241 districts 2005–06: 891 high schools; 259 districts 2006–07: 949 schools; 271 districts	2004–05: 428,678 ninth grade students 2005–06: 449,759 ninth grade students 2006–07: 409,366 ninth grade students	Participating high schools reduce class size in grade nine English and one other course required for graduation (either mathematics, science, or social studies) per California <i>Education Code</i> Section 51225.3. Districts may also serve grades ten, eleven, or twelve if they have continuously implemented the program since 1998. Each participating school shall on the average have no more than 20 pupils per certificated teacher and no more than 22 pupils in any participating class.

Programs: Voluntary Enrollment	Funding	Number of Schools/Districts	Number of Students	General Information
Regional Occupational Centers and Programs (Prevention, Intervention)	General Fund. Federal and state grants.	73 centers	Approximately 460,000	Provides career technical education to high school students 16 years of age and older and adult students.
Smaller Learning Communities (Prevention)	N/A	Unknown	Unknown	CDE provides technical assistance. The following programs and structures comprise smaller learning communities: California Partnership Academies, Specialized Secondary Programs, Federally Funded Smaller Learning Communities, International Baccalaureate Programs, whole districts realigning into smaller learning communities, small schools, and a variety of other programs and configurations.

Programs: Voluntary Enrollment	Funding	Number of Schools/Districts	Number of Students	General Information
Specialized Secondary Programs (Prevention)	Grant: 2005–06: \$5,573,000 2006–07: \$5,916,000 \$185,000–\$285,000 for program planning and implementation over four years.	2004–05: 55 high schools; 54 districts 2005–06: 69 high schools; 63 districts 2006–07: 75 high schools; 49 districts	2004–05: 9,000 2005–06: 8,633 2006–07: 9,408	<p>Provides start-up funds for the establishment of new, advanced programs in California high schools. The programs are expected to be a model for standards-based instruction, rich in curriculum content with varied instructional methodologies that emphasize expanded, in-depth study of a targeted content area or a thematic or career focus.</p> <p>Successful if:</p> <p>80 percent of the participating students pursue either postsecondary education or additional professional training in chosen field of study after graduation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80 percent of the students complete high school education.

Programs: Mandatory Enrollment	Funding	Number of Schools/Districts	Number of Students	General Information
Community Day Schools (Retention)	General Fund ADA plus additional budgetary allocation for supplemental funding to support smaller classes with an extended day.	2005–06: 338 schools 2006–07: 359 schools	2005–06: 11,182* 2006–07: 11,380*	<p>Serves grades kindergarten through twelve students expelled, on probation, referred by a school attendance review board (SARB), or other district level referral.</p> <p>Created to provide school districts with an educational placement option for expelled students who previously could not be served within the district.</p> <p>Focuses on challenging academic programs and development of pro-social skills, student self-esteem, and resiliency. Separate from comprehensive, opportunity, or continuation schools.</p>

Programs: Mandatory Enrollment	Funding	Number of Schools/Districts	Number of Students	General Information
County Community Schools (Retention)	General Fund ADA to county offices of education.	2005–06: 51 schools 2006–07: 56 schools	2005–06: 17,280* 2006–07: 18, 242*	Serves grades kindergarten through twelve students who are expelled; referred by juvenile court, SARB, or parent/guardian request; on probation or parole and not in attendance in any school; or homeless. Operated by county offices of education.
County Court (Juvenile Court) Schools (Retention)	General Fund ADA to county offices of education.	2005–06: 61 schools 2007–07: 56 schools	2005–06: 12,483* 2006–07: 12,786*	Students under the authority of the juvenile court system and incarcerated in juvenile halls, ranches, and camps. Operated by county offices of education. Provides alternative education.
Correctional Education (Recovery, Retention)	Federal Workforce Investment Act. 2006– 07: \$3.6 million	33 adult schools in each of the 33 state prisons	2006: 40,000	Provides basic literacy through high school diploma and GED programs for adults in correctional settings and parole offices.

Programs: Mandatory Enrollment	Funding	Number of Schools/Districts	Number of Students	General Information
California Division of Juvenile Justice (Recovery, Retention)	Federal Workforce Investment Act. 2006– 07: \$158,175	8 schools in the institutions	2006–07: approximately 2,500	Provides literacy through high school diploma.

Pupil Retention Block Grant: Established by Assembly Bill 825, Chapter 871, Statutes of 2004. *Education Code* sections 41505–41508. This block grant combined eight separate appropriations. Charter schools are not eligible to receive Pupil Retention Block Grant funding.

2005–06 Funding: \$86,957,000

2006–07 Funding: \$93,687,000

Programs in Pupil Retention Block Grant	Prior Funding	Number of Schools/Districts	Number of Students	General Information
<p>Continuation Education</p> <p>(enrollment may be voluntary or mandatory)</p> <p>(Prevention, Intervention, Recovery, Retention)</p>	<p>2005–06: Pupil Retention Block Grant.</p> <p>New, approved continuation high schools may generate increased funding. Funding will be rescinded for continuation high schools that close after 2003-04.</p>	<p>2005–06: 521 schools 2006–07: 519 schools</p>	<p>2005–06: 69,601* 2006–07: 71,363*</p>	<p><i>Education Code</i> sections 44865, 46170, 48400–48438, and 51055.</p> <p>High school diploma program to meet the needs of students ages sixteen through eighteen who have not graduated from high school, are not exempt from compulsory school attendance, and are deemed at risk of not graduating.</p> <p>In addition to academic courses, emphasizes occupational or career orientation or a work-study schedule.</p> <p>Students may be credit deficient and may need flexibility due to employment or other issues.</p>

Programs in Pupil Retention Block Grant	Prior Funding	Number of Schools/Districts	Number of Students	General Information
<p>Dropout and Prevention Recovery: Alternative Education Outreach Consultant Program (Recovery)</p>	<p>2005–06: \$2.5 million as part of Pupil Retention Block Grant.</p> <p>\$50,000 per district.</p> <p>District responsible for supplementing funds with other resources to meet intent of the law.</p>	<p>50 districts</p>	<p>Approximately 15,000 high-risk students</p>	<p><i>Education Code</i> sections repealed.</p> <p>Must maintain the same number of state-funded outreach consultants that were maintained in 2004–05.</p> <p>Dropout recovery program located at a continuation high school, adult school, or other alternative site. Funds are for the sole use of hiring a dropout prevention specialist who identifies and provides services to high-risk students and their families.</p>

Programs in Pupil Retention Block Grant	Prior Funding	Number of Schools/Districts	Number of Students	General Information
Dropout Prevention and Recovery: Educational Clinics (Recovery)	2005–06: Pupil Retention Block Grant. Discretionary at the district level. \$1.3 million that used to fund Educational Clinic programs became discretionary for programs in block grant.	5 clinics throughout the state	N/A	<i>Education Code</i> sections repealed. Dropout recovery program: students who have been out of school for at least 45 days or who have been expelled from school to an educational setting.

Programs in Pupil Retention Block Grant	Prior Funding	Number of Schools/Districts	Number of Students	General Information
<p>Dropout and Prevention Recovery:</p> <p>School-Based Pupil Motivation and Maintenance Program</p> <p>(Prevention, Intervention)</p>	<p>2005–06: \$16.6 million as part of Pupil Retention Block Grant.</p> <p>\$50,000 for consultant.</p> <p>No more applications.</p> <p>Districts that operated the program in 2004–05 continue to receive funding.</p>	336 schools	N/A	<p><i>Education Code</i> sections repealed.</p> <p>Dropout prevention program: Early identification and early prevention program.</p> <p>Must maintain the same number of state-funded outreach consultants that were maintained in 2004–05.</p> <p>Funds a dropout prevention specialist (Outreach consultant). Other key components include positive attendance and discipline programs, Student Study/Success Teams, Coordination of Service Teams, and resiliency-creating strategies.</p>

Programs in Pupil Retention Block Grant	Prior Funding	Number of Schools/Districts	Number of Students	General Information
High Risk Youth Education and Public Safety Program (Retention)	<p>2005–06: Pupil Retention Block Grant.</p> <p>\$11 million annually to LEAs and county offices of education.</p> <p>Use of funds now at the discretion of administration in each county office of education/school district.</p>	2003–04: 13 counties operated more than 60 sites.	2004–05: estimated 5,000 (grades 7–12)	<p><i>Education Code</i> sections repealed.</p> <p>Provided after-school programming for students on probation.</p>
<p>Opportunity Education (classes and programs)</p> <p>(Intervention, Retention)</p>	<p>2005–06: Pupil Retention Block Grant.</p> <p>LEA's that received funding in 2003–04 for Opportunity Education Program are eligible to receive funds.</p> <p>Use of funds at the discretion of administration in each county office of education/school district.</p>	<p>2004–05: 418 schools</p> <p>2005–06: 15 schools</p> <p>2006–07: 34 schools</p>	<p>2004–05: 9,366*</p> <p>2005–06: 8,297* (1,738 in opportunity schools)</p> <p>2006–07: 7,566* (4,068 in opportunity schools)</p>	<p><i>Education Code</i> sections 48630–48639 repealed; county opportunity school code sections 46180, 48640, and 48641 remain.</p> <p>Grades one through twelve students who are habitually truant, insubordinate, or disorderly.</p> <p>Specialized curriculum, supportive learning environment, and guidance to facilitate transition back to regular programs.</p>

Programs in Pupil Retention Block Grant	Prior Funding	Number of Schools/Districts	Number of Students	General Information
Tenth-Grade Counseling Program (Prevention, Intervention)	2005–06: Pupil Retention Block Grant. 2004–05: \$11,443,000 \$25.28 per pupil per prior year.	2004–05: Virtually every school district in California with a high school now receives state funding to provide a tenth grade counseling program to students.	N/A	<i>Education Code</i> sections repealed. Requires school districts to provide a systematic review of each student's academic progress and counseling regarding educational options available during the final two years of high school. Students who are not progressing satisfactorily toward graduation or not motivated toward education and career goals appropriate to their ability should receive priority for counseling.

* The student numbers are based on CBEDS data reflecting the number of students enrolled on a single day in October, when CBEDS data are reported each year. Because of the turnover that occurs as students transition into and out of educational alternative placements throughout the year, the enrollment numbers undercount, to an unknown but probably significant extent, the number of students actually served in these programs. Department data indicates a total of 436,919 students for 2006–07.

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