

Question: You requested information on state dropout prevention programs targeted at students in grade 9 or below.

Response: A variety of dropout prevention initiatives are focused on students in the middle grades or grade 9. These include:

More details on each of these approaches are provided in the section that follows.

Early warning systems

[Seminal research](#) published by Robert Balfanz, Lisa Herzog, and Douglas J. Maciver in 2007 identifies four predictive indicators could identify 60% of the middle grades students who ultimately did not graduate from high school. These indicators include:

- Attending school 80% of the time during 6th grade
- Failing 6th grade math
- Failing 6th grade English
- Receiving an out-of-school suspension in 6th grade.

According to [data](#) (see “supplementary data file”) published by the Data Quality Campaign (DQC) in 2013, Texas is one of 31 jurisdictions publishing early warning reports at that time. However, DQC data suggest Texas was not one of the 26 jurisdictions using early warning reports to identify students at risk of dropping out. Louisiana’s DEWS (Dropout Early Warning System), the nation’s oldest early warning system, is considered a national model. A 2011 Civic Enterprises report, [On Track for Success](#), provides a case study of Louisiana’s DEWS program.

Targeted intervention to districts with higher dropout rates

Legislation in Louisiana and Rhode Island directs a state entity (state board in Louisiana, department of elementary and secondary education in Rhode Island) to work with school districts with the lowest graduation rates (four-year cohort graduation rates below 80% in Louisiana, dropout rate greater than 15% in Rhode Island), to develop specific methods of targeted intervention or identify appropriate existing methods. The table below identifies the methods set forth in Louisiana and Rhode Island statute that may be considered. Some of the identified approaches clearly have implications for grades 6-9.

Louisiana	Rhode Island
Early intervention for students who are at risk of failing Algebra I or any ninth grade math class.	Early intervention for students who fail Algebra I or any ninth grade math class and have insufficient credits to be promoted.
Alternative programs designed to reengage dropouts.	Alternative programs designed to reengage dropouts

Additional data & links

[A practitioner’s guide to implementing early warning systems](#) (REL Northwest, January 2015) provides examples of early warning system implementation strategies used nationally, including those to identify students at risk of dropping out.

The Data Quality Campaign [website](#) offers a variety of resources on [early warning systems](#).

Louisiana	Rhode Island
	including dual enrollment courses at the community college level.
Increased availability of Advanced Placement courses.	Increased availability of Advanced Placement courses.
Comprehensive coaching for middle school students who are below grade level in reading and math.	Comprehensive supplemental education programs for middle school students who are below grade level in reading and math.
Teacher advisories such as the use of graduation coaches and other supports that are designed to specifically address the needs of youth most at risk of dropping out of school.	Teacher advisories and other supports that are designed to specifically address the needs of youth most at risk of dropping out of school.
Strategies specifically designed to improve the high school graduation rate of students at highest risk for dropping out, including youth in the foster care system, pregnant and parenting youth, Limited English Proficient students, and students with special education needs.	Strategies that are specifically designed to improve high school graduation rate of teens at highest risk for dropping out, including youth in the foster care system, pregnant and parenting youth, English as a second language learners, and teens with special education needs.
Communicating with students and their parents or legal guardians about the availability of local after school programs and the academic enrichment and other activities the programs offered.	Communicating with parents and students about the availability of local afterschool programs and the academic enrichment and other activities the programs offer.
Opportunities for credit recovery.	Offering full course fee waivers for students eligible for free and reduced lunches, when enrolled in dual credit courses.
Opportunities to participate in the Jobs for America's Graduates program.	Flexible programs for older students who are currently not enrolled.

Louisiana and Rhode Island also require the state board (in Louisiana) or department of elementary and secondary education (in Rhode Island) to collect specified data, including on course failures and 9th grade retention rates, high school student suspensions and expulsion, and student enrollments in alternative education programs, to ensure that all programs are research-based and data-driven and use such data for continuous program improvement. Participating Rhode Island districts, and Louisiana school districts that fail to reverse dropout rates, must submit an annual report to the state board on outcomes of dropout prevention strategies the district is using, and how the school system dropout prevention strategies and activities will be modified, based on the data. ([LSA-R.S. 17:221.4](#); Gen. Laws 1956, § 16-67.1-2)

Voluntary identification of middle grades students exhibiting dropout risk factors

Colorado [2012 H.B. 1013](#) directs each school district to consider adopting procedures for schools serving any grades 6-9 to review relevant data for students in those grades and identify students demonstrating behaviors indicating the student is at greater risk for dropping out. The behaviors may include but are not limited to low academic achievement, truancy, insubordinate behavior, and disengagement. Procedures may specify that after a student is identified as being at risk of dropping out, the school must provide appropriate interventions to help the student improve his/her academic performance and behavior and increase the student's level of school engagement. Interventions may include counseling, tutoring, parent engagement, and developmental education services.

If a school district adopts such procedures, the district must notify a student's parents as soon as possible after the student is identified as at greater risk of dropping out. The district must provide the parents with a description of the interventions the district intends to implement for the student. The parent may approve or reject these interventions, and the district is prohibited from implementing interventions rejected by the parent. The parent is also authorized to terminate an intervention at any time after the district begins to offer it. A parent is also authorized to contact the district to request an intervention if the parent determines the student is at greater risk of dropping out. (C.R.S.A. § 22-32-118.5)

Targeted, high-quality training for secondary school counselors and other secondary school staff

It is widely noted that school counselors in under-resourced secondary schools often have the largest caseloads. In 2008, Colorado [H.B. 1370](#) established the Colorado School Counselor Corps Grant Program to increase the number of school counselors in schools serving any grades 7-12 and to enhance the quality of services those counselors are equipped to provide. Applications by "education providers" (i.e., school districts, boards of cooperative services, and charter schools) must, at a minimum, identify:

- The intended recipient secondary schools, the number of secondary school counselors employed by the education provider prior to receipt of a grant, and the student-school counselor ratio in the secondary schools operated by or receiving services from the education provider
- Whether the education provider has adopted standards for school counselor responsibilities, as recommended by a national association of school counselors
- Whether the education provider has entered into, or has committed to establishing, one or more partnerships with Colorado institutions of higher education or postsecondary service providers to support and increase the capacity and effectiveness of the counseling and postsecondary preparation services provided to secondary school students enrolled in or receiving educational services from the education provider
- The education provider's plan for using grant funds, including the extent to which the grant moneys will be used to increase the number of school counselors at recipient secondary schools and to provide professional development for school counselors and professional development to enable other faculty members to provide counseling and postsecondary preparation services at recipient secondary schools
- The education provider's plan for involving leaders at the recipient secondary schools and in the surrounding community and the faculty at recipient secondary schools in increasing the capacity and effectiveness of the counseling and postsecondary preparation services provided to secondary school students enrolled in or receiving educational services from the education provider
- The extent to which the education provider has developed or plans to develop partnerships to serve the postsecondary needs of all of the secondary students enrolled in or receiving educational services from the education provider
- The education provider's use of district-level, or school-level if the education provider is a charter school, needs assessments that identify challenging issues in the district or school in terms of student learning and success and identification of any programs initiated or services provided by the education provider to secondary students that have helped to increase graduation rates and the level of postsecondary success among graduates
- The education provider's attendance, grade-retention and promotion, and grading policies
- Whether the education provider intends to provide matching funds to augment program grant funds and the anticipated amount and source of any matching funds

- The education provider's plan for continuing to fund the increases in school counseling services following expiration of the grant. (C.R.S.A. § 22-91-104(2))

In reviewing grant applications and making recommendations to the department and state board of education, the school counselor corps advisory board must consider several factors, including the dropout rate at the intended recipient secondary school(s) and, if the education provider is a school district, at all of the secondary schools within the school district. The school counselor corps advisory board, department, and state board must give priority to education providers that intend to use the grant funds to assist secondary schools with dropout rates exceeding the statewide average. (C.R.S.A. § 22-91-104(3))

The legislation requires education providers receiving grants to report on specified program outcomes, including a comparison of the dropout rates, and the college matriculation and remediation rates, if applicable, at the recipient secondary schools for the years prior to receipt of the grant and the years for which the education provider receives the grant. (C.R.S.A. § 22-91-105(1)(d))

The 2008 legislation was enhanced in 2014 by [the addition of provisions](#) requiring grant receiving schools to use state guidelines and standards to implement a comprehensive counseling model that includes a time and effort assessment, postsecondary workforce-ready programming, and social and emotional counseling work. The 2014 amendments also required grantees to collect data on its counseling program to demonstrate the impact of the school counseling program on student achievement, attendance, and behavior. The education provider shall use the data to analyze school counseling program assessments to guide future action and improve future results for all students.

Data from the Colorado Department of Education suggest the program has had a positive impact on high school graduation rates as well as college-readiness and matriculation. According to a fall 2015 [fact sheet](#), “Comparable non-SCCGP schools showed increasing dropout rates and decreasing graduation rates, while SCCGP schools showed decreasing dropout rates and maintaining graduation rates over the same period of time ... Dropout rates at School Counselor Corps secondary schools decreased by 3.5 percentage points.” More details on the School Counselor Corps Grant Program and program outcomes can be found on the Colorado Department of Education [website](#).

Mentorship programs

Oklahoma statute ([70 Okl. St. Ann. § 1210.527](#)) directs the State Department of Education to encourage school boards and districts to develop mentorship programs that identify middle and high school students who are at a high risk of dropping out, and provide these students with comprehensive prevention and intervention programs.

The statute encourages mentors to work with identified students to assist in:

- Transitioning from middle school to high school
- Creation of personal graduation plans
- Counseling of students on the consequences of dropping out
- Beginning career exploration with students at an earlier age
- Informing parents and students on the impact of middle school grades on high school placement and achievement
- Providing students with guidance in selecting courses
- Providing students with tutoring and extra academic assistance as needed.

Graduation coaches

Georgia's Graduation Coach Initiative, launched in the 2006-2007 school year, was expanded in 2007-2008 to introduce graduation coaches in each middle school in the state. Graduation coaches were trained to use an online program, the Work Management System (WMS). According to the [2007-2008 report](#), graduation coaches applied WMS to:

- Identify students who may reap the greatest benefits from structured interventions
- Identify "pervasive needs in their school's student population"
- Prioritize student supports "based on magnitude of need"
- "[Structure] intervention levels based on co-occurrence of multiple risk factors".

The 2007-2008 report notes, for middle and high school graduation coaches combined, "13,723 graduation coach caseload-served students who were identified as at risk for having less than 92% attendance were no longer at risk by the end of the 2007-2008 school year because they attended at least 92% of days enrolled." However, "20,161 caseload-served students who were identified as at risk for having less than 92% attendance were still at risk at the end of the 2007-2008 school year because they attended fewer than 92% of days enrolled." The report suggests the program may have been enhanced by better calibrating the number of graduation coaches with the high schools experiencing the greatest need. Specifically, "an average of 120 students were identified as at risk in middle schools as compared to an average of 489 students identified as at risk in high schools. Despite this disproportion, however, both high school and middle school coaches possessed – on average – the same size caseloads (approximately 120-140 students). A shortfall, therefore, existed in high schools where demand far exceeded capacity."

While the graduation coach program was eventually discontinued, a state program applying this and other lessons learned from the Georgia experience may provide valuable services to at-risk middle grades and high school students.