

**Academic  
Interventions to  
Help Students Meet  
Rigorous Standards**

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***State Policy Options***



NATIONAL  
HIGH SCHOOL  
ALLIANCE

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WASHINGTON, DC

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# **Academic Interventions to Help Students Meet Rigorous Standards**

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## ***State Policy Options***

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### **The Vision and Mission of the National High School Alliance**

The National High School Alliance is a partnership of over fifty leading organizations that share a **vision** for a nationwide commitment to fostering high academic achievement, closing the achievement gap, and promoting civic and personal growth among all youth in our high schools and communities.

To advance this vision, the Alliance's **mission** is to engage its partners to work individually and collectively to inform policy, practice, and research, and to promote public awareness and engagement. The Alliance accomplishes this by providing a forum for professional discourse and collaborative effort to leverage its partners' resources, knowledge, and capacity.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>i-ii</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Background and Context</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>The State Role in Providing Academic Interventions</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Academic Intervention Programs</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Accelerated Learning Options</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Extended Learning Time Programs</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Personalized Learning Environments</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Dropout Prevention and Recovery Programs</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Incorporating Literacy Instruction into the Curriculum</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Interventions in Context: Developing a Comprehensive Plan for Change</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Academic Interventions Indiana</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Academic Interventions in Virginia</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Summary of State Policy Options</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>Data Systems</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>Structural Changes</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Curriculum and Instruction</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>Sources: State Examples</b> .....	<b>31</b>

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## **Academic Interventions to Help Students Meet Rigorous Standards: State Policy Options**

### *Executive Summary*

#### **Background and Context**

Calls to raise rigor and graduation rates in our nation's high schools are increasing, coming from both national organizations and policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels. As policymakers and practitioners at all levels work to implement these reforms, they are becoming aware of an acute and immediate need to help students already struggling under existing standards to meet new, more rigorous requirements. In the August 2006 issue brief, *Increasing Academic Rigor in High Schools: Stakeholder Perspectives*, and the accompanying tool, *Defining Rigor in High School: Framework and Assessment Tool*, the National High School Alliance identified key elements of reform efforts to increase rigor in high school and provided a conceptual framework to help policymakers and practitioners develop a common language to discuss rigor. This report addresses the needs of students struggling to reach these higher standards through the lens of state policy.

The purpose of this report is to inform the design of state policies and programs to help at-risk students succeed as they face challenging, college preparatory curricula and increased graduation requirements. It is also intended as a tool for initiating dialogue among leaders about effective policies and programs.

While a more challenging curriculum may increase the engagement of at-risk students, there is no doubt that their success will require significant academic supports. This report makes the "case" for a state role in providing supports for struggling students and provides information to take action: a review of current literature on academic interventions from national research and policy organizations; brief descriptions of these interventions; examples of state-level implementation; and options for state policymakers based on this information. The final section is designed to help state policymakers develop a comprehensive policy agenda by organizing the recommended state policy options around three thematic categories: data systems; structural changes; and curriculum and instruction.

#### **The State Role in Providing Academic Interventions**

It is critical that state policies to increase rigor include targeted strategies to support struggling students, particularly in the most high-need schools and districts. Although the primary responsibility for providing academic interventions currently lies at the district and school level, there are steps that states can take to increase their role and develop a more comprehensive system for improvement. States can develop early warning and identification systems, fund the development, evaluation, and expansion of interventions, and provide resources and technical assistance to help schools and districts implement intervention programs.

### **Academic Intervention Programs**

Based on a review of current literature from national research and policy organizations, the National High School Alliance identified five categories of academic interventions that characterize the vast array of programs and policies directed toward struggling students.

- I. Accelerated Learning Options
- II. Extended Learning Time Programs
- III. Personalized Learning Environments
- IV. Dropout Prevention and Recovery Programs
- V. Incorporate Literacy Instruction into the Curriculum

### **Developing a Comprehensive Plan for Change**

In this report, the National High School Alliance recommends a range of state policy options based on an analysis of research and the literature of national policy and research organizations. The interventions that these policies support, however, cannot be effective unless they are part of a broader agenda to transform the entire school culture as it relates to learning, teaching, supports, expectations, and relationships among students and adults. The strategies targeted toward struggling and at-risk students must also be part of a larger comprehensive plan with the objective of ensuring that *all* students are ready for post-secondary education, careers, and active civic participation. States can support a comprehensive approach to designing interventions that meet the needs of all students through legislation that provides funding and requires explicit attention to the needs of at-risk students. This section of the report also provides descriptions of two states—Indiana and Virginia—where interventions for at-risk students are being provided in the context of a state-wide high school reform agenda.

### **Summary of State Policy Options**

This summary section provides an “at-a-glance” review of the state policy options recommended throughout the report. To help policymakers approach these options as potential “policy levers,” they are grouped into three major thematic categories: data systems; structural changes; and, curriculum and instruction.

## Introduction

The purpose of this report is to inform the design of new state policies and programs to help at-risk students succeed as they face challenging, college preparatory curricula and increased graduation requirements. It is also intended as a tool for initiating dialogue among leaders about effective policies and programs.

The National High School Alliance (Alliance) has conducted a scan and analysis of national research and policy organizations regarding provision of academic interventions to struggling students. Policymakers and practitioners at all levels are struggling to find ways to help schools and districts meet the goal of increasing academic rigor for all students. Armed with a better understanding of how national organizations are conceptualizing and advocating for support for struggling students, policymakers will gain insight into effective strategies best suited for their particular context. This analysis also helps policymakers develop an understanding of a broader range of effective approaches and strategies which might be part of each school, district and states' student support apparatus.

To frame the need for these policies and programs, this brief first outlines why policies to support at-risk youth<sup>1</sup> are needed. The brief then describes and categorizes the programs and strategies advocated by national policy and research organizations. Finally, the brief concludes with some policy recommendations for consideration at the state level.

## Background and Context

As states work to make high school education more rigorous and relevant, they are becoming aware of an acute and immediate need to help students already struggling under existing standards to meet new, more rigorous requirements. While policies that increase rigor *writ large* typically intend to improve educational outcomes for all students, these policies will not be successful with all students without strategies that specifically address the challenge of meeting the very different needs of students at different levels and circumstances.

In response to rapidly changing economic, social, demographic and technological contexts, leaders nationwide are looking more closely at the traditional American high school, and seeking strategies to ensure that all graduates are prepared for post-secondary education and careers. A generation or two ago, high school dropouts might expect to find jobs and earn decent wages; a high school diploma was certainly considered adequate educational attainment for economic sufficiency and success. Today, high school dropouts face a lifetime of economic hardship and insecurity. Their earnings have declined significantly; “the median earnings of families headed by a high school dropout declined by nearly a third between 1974 and 2004.”<sup>2</sup> They are also more

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<sup>1</sup> The terms at-risk, low-achieving, and struggling students are used interchangeably to indicate students who are having difficulty meeting grade level standards and includes students who are in danger of dropping out of school.

<sup>2</sup>Postsecondary Education OPPORTUNITY. Median Family income in Constant 2004 Dollars: 1974 and 2004, 2006. Available from <http://www.postsecondary.org/archives/Posters/MedFamInc04.pdf>; Internet; quoted in Craig Jerald, *Identifying Potential Dropouts* (Washington, DC: Achieve, 2006)

likely to be unemployed. In addition, a high school diploma does not provide nearly the access and opportunity that it once did; according to a number of recent studies, being well prepared for a career is synonymous with being prepared for postsecondary education, and requires a degree of academic proficiency once reserved for a subset of high achieving high school students.<sup>3</sup>

National research and policy organizations are grappling with this urgent need to raise graduation rates and improve students' preparation for both college and the workplace. Policymakers are also seeking to understand how states can increase graduation requirements and graduation rates at the same time, and how the goal of increased rigor can become reality rather than rhetoric for more students. Most states have yet to design comprehensive systems for addressing the needs of at-risk students and ensuring they are prepared for more rigorous curricula and graduation requirements. Therefore, the Alliance is conducting this research to learn about the range of strategies national policy and research organizations are recommending to address the needs of struggling students and to inform states as they develop strategies to help all students succeed.

While all high school redesign is focused on the general and laudable goal of helping all students meet more rigorous requirements, this brief focuses on programs and policies specifically designed to help those students who are already struggling under existing standards. In conducting this analysis, it has been challenging to distinguish between programs that specifically address the needs of struggling learners from general high school redesign efforts intended to increase the quality of learning for all schools and students. As states work to increase rigor, however, it is clear that they will need to invest in providing specific interventions to meet the different needs of at-risk students. One size does not fit all, and a common vision of increased rigor implies a wide range of policies and interventions designed to help students and schools with very different needs, interests and challenges.

Today, it is estimated that about 20-30% of students are dropping out of high school nationally.<sup>4</sup> Who are these students? A large body of research provides information about factors that increase the likelihood of dropping out. First and foremost, concentrated poverty is the key driver of dropping out; poverty has almost a perfectly linear relationship with graduation rates.<sup>5</sup> Research also demonstrates that low-performing students, students with poor attendance, and students who are over-age and under-credited for their grade are more likely to dropout.<sup>6</sup> Students who come from single parent families or have parents with low levels of education or provide little support for education are also more likely to drop out.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See for instance, ACT, *Ready for College and Ready for Work: Same or Different?* (Iowa City, Iowa: ACT, 2006)

<sup>4</sup> This range represents estimates of graduation rates provided by Jay Greene and Marcus Winters at the Manhattan Institute and Lawrence Mishel of the Economic Policy Institute. Winters, See Jay Greene and Marcus Winters, *Public High School Graduation and College-Readiness Rates: 1991–2002, Education Working Paper*, (Washington, DC: Manhattan Institute, 2005) and Lawrence Mishel and Joydeep Roy, *Rethinking High School Graduation Rates and Trends*, (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Bob Balfanz and Nettie Legters, Presentation to the Alliance for Excellent Education, March 28, 2007, Washington, DC

<sup>6</sup> Jerald, 2006

<sup>7</sup> Jerald, 2006

Poll data also shed light on dropouts' perceptions of school. Poll results from Achieve, Inc.<sup>8</sup> indicate that large percentages of students who drop out of high school are likely to be bored and disengaged. *The Silent Epidemic*, a survey of dropouts conducted for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, found that most dropouts believe they could have succeeded in school if they had worked harder. The bottom line—students who are struggling under existing standards may be motivated by more challenging standards, but will still need significant academic support to succeed under a more rigorous curriculum. As a result, policymakers should act pointedly to ensure that strategies and investments that support these students are a priority.

### **The State Role in Providing Academic Interventions**

In most states, schools and districts bear primary responsibility for providing academic interventions to struggling students. States have limited purview and influence over these internal program decisions. Frequently, states are involved in identifying failing schools and districts for accountability purposes, but most have not designed comprehensive systems for helping them improve. As states call for increased academic rigor and become more active in transforming high schools, it is clear that the state role in providing academic interventions will need to expand as well.

As states improve the accuracy of their graduation and dropout data and expand their accountability systems, they will be faced with information about which schools and districts are producing the greatest numbers of dropouts and will be compelled to take action at the state level. As a recent study has shown, the dropout problem is not equally distributed among schools. There are a small group of high schools (900-1000 schools) that are “dropout factories”—where graduating is a 50/50 proposition.<sup>9</sup> In 2,000 high schools, graduation rates are not greater than 60%.<sup>10</sup> These high schools are more likely to be high minority and high poverty.<sup>11</sup>

In light of these data, it is critical that state policies to increase rigor include targeted strategies to support struggling students, particularly in the most high-need schools and districts. States can develop early warning and identification systems, fund the development, evaluation, and expansion of interventions, and provide resources and technical assistance to help schools and districts implement intervention programs.

The following sections of this report present a review of promising academic intervention programs, summaries of the research literature, and based on this information, options for state policymakers to consider.

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<sup>8</sup> Hart Research Associates/Public Opinion Strategies, *Rising to the Challenge: Are High School Graduates Prepared for College and Work*, (Washington, DC: Achieve, 2005)

<sup>9</sup> Robert Balfanz and Nettie Legters, *Locating the Dropout Crisis, Which High Schools Produce the Nation's Dropouts? Where are they Located? Who Attends Them?* (Baltimore, MD: Center for Social Organization of Schools, 2004)

<sup>10</sup> Balfanz and Legters, 2004

<sup>11</sup> Balfanz and Legters, 2004

### **Academic Intervention Programs**

In its scan of national research and policy organizations,<sup>12</sup> the National High School Alliance identified five categories of academic interventions that characterize the vast array of programs and policies directed to struggling students. These are:

- I. Accelerated instruction,
- II. Extended learning time,
- III. Personalized learning environments,
- IV. Dropout prevention and recovery programs, and
- V. Incorporating literacy instruction into the curriculum.

These five categories provide a useful way to catalogue and think about types of interventions. These categories are not entirely discrete—there is some degree of overlap between them. In addition, they can be quite complex. The effort to provide personalized and relevant instruction, for example, can be the underpinnings of an entire school reform strategy. Each of these sets of strategies and their theory of action is described below. We present a description of each category, present key research findings where available, and distill policy options for future action.

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<sup>12</sup> See references for the organizations and publications reviewed.

**I. Accelerated learning options** incorporate two kinds of programs: credit-based transition programs that provide college credit to high school students and lessen the time towards a college degree, and “catch-up” programs that accelerate students’ learning to help them meet grade level standards and earn high school credit more quickly. This section will focus on credit-based transition programs. For a discussion of “catch-up” programs see the section on extended learning time.

The theory behind credit-based transition programs is that providing at-risk students with more challenging course work and access to higher education is a more powerful motivator than providing them solely with remediation.<sup>13</sup> Models for providing credit-based transition programs include the following: dual enrollment; early college high schools; and middle college high schools

*Dual enrollment programs* allow students to earn high school and college credit simultaneously. While in the past these programs have been primarily targeted to a relatively small group of students in the college prep track, many organizations are now advocating their expansion so that more students have access to them. *Early college and middle college high schools* are a subset of dual enrollment programs that have been designed to improve at-risk students’ transition to higher education. Students begin early college programs by enrolling in high school level courses and are able to enroll in college level courses when they have met high school standards. High school requirements are streamlined so students can complete them more quickly and move on to take college-level courses. Some programs allow participants to earn an associate’s degree or two years of college credit towards a baccalaureate while in high school. Early and middle college high schools also share many of the advantages of smaller schools—including providing a more personalized learning environment and closer relationships between faculty and students.<sup>14</sup>

#### **NORTH CAROLINA**

##### ***New Schools Project and Learn and Earn Early College High Schools Initiative***

*The New Schools Project (NSP) is a public/private partnership of the Governor’s Education Cabinet and the Public School Forum supported by an \$11 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The NSP forms partnerships between school districts and higher education institutions to create small high schools that provide a personalized learning environment and academically rigorous curriculum.*

*The Learn and Earn High School Initiative is a joint project of the NC Department of Public Instruction and the NSP. It is designed to improve graduation rates and college-going rates, and better prepare students for high-skill jobs and higher education. Learn and Earn high schools enable participating students to graduate in five years with a high school diploma and an associate’s degree or two years of college credit. There are 13 Learn and Earn schools currently in operation and Gov. Easley plans to expand the program to serve all 100 counties in the state by 2008.*

<sup>13</sup> Nancy Hoffman and Katie Bayerl, *Add and Subtract , Dual Enrollment as a State Strategy to Increase Postsecondary Success for Underrepresented Students* (Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future, 2005)

<sup>14</sup> JFF, Early College High School Initiative, Core Principles

The benefits of all of these credit-based transition programs include motivating at-risk students, improving the transition between high school and higher education and making higher education more affordable and accessible.<sup>15</sup>

### What the Research Says

While many of these programs are too new to have been rigorously evaluated, several programs have shown positive outcomes for students.<sup>16</sup> A recent review of research by the American Youth Policy Forum found that evaluations of secondary-postsecondary learning options suggested positive outcomes in the areas of credit accrual, performance on standardized tests, high school completion, college going rates, and college grades.<sup>17</sup> Few of these evaluations, however, used longitudinal data or control groups so findings cannot be considered conclusive.<sup>18</sup>

Research on middle college high schools found that their graduates generally performed better than students in other alternative schools, did well on state assessments, and graduated from high school at higher rates than other students in their school district, though they also had relatively low rates of bachelor's degree attainment."<sup>19</sup> In addition, evaluations of comprehensive dual enrollment programs found that participants were successful in college.<sup>20</sup> These studies, however, did not control for student characteristics such as levels of motivation, and therefore must be considered suggestive rather than conclusive.<sup>21</sup>

### State Policy Options

- *Provide accelerated learning grants to support partnerships between districts and institutions of higher education.* States could offer grants to districts that partner with colleges or universities to develop early college high schools, middle colleges, and dual enrollment programs. States could provide start up funding and technical assistance for the development of these programs and provide tuition for student participants.

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<sup>15</sup> JFF, Early College High School Initiative, Core Principles

<sup>16</sup> Bailey and Karp, 2003; Jennifer Brown Lerner and Betsy Brand, *The College Ladder: Linking Secondary and Postsecondary Education for Success for All Students* (Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum, 2006)

<sup>17</sup> Lerner and Brand, 2006

<sup>18</sup> Lerner and Brand, 2006

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Bailey and Melinda Karp, *Promoting College Access and Success: A Review of Credit Based Transition Programs*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Adult and Vocational Education, 2003)

<sup>20</sup> Bailey and Karp, 2003

<sup>21</sup> Bailey and Karp, 2003

**II. Extended learning time programs** provide additional instructional time and support services to at-risk students to help them meet grade-level standards and to improve their personal, social, and academic development. Many analysts recommend focusing on ninth grade, a key transition year for preventing dropouts and ensuring success in high school. The programs are structured in a variety of ways and can be offered during the school day or outside of the school day. Within the school day, extended learning time programs are generally focused on improving students' academic achievement and providing remedial support to prepare students to take a college preparatory curriculum. These programs include the following: shadow classes; catch-up courses; block scheduling, and after-school and/or summer programs.

*Shadow classes* provide students with an additional class period to learn a particular subject. They provide additional time and individualized support immediately following a class in order to master its content. *Catch-up courses* are designed to prepare students for successful participation in college preparatory coursework.<sup>22</sup>

**MASSACHUSETTS**  
**Statewide Extended Learning**

*Massachusetts is pioneering a statewide extended learning initiative. The purpose of the state initiative is to close the achievement gap by expanding instructional time—particularly for at-risk students. The state has lengthened the school day by 30 percent in 10 elementary and middle schools in 5 districts during the 2006-07 school year. The state is planning to expand the initiative and has awarded planning grants, ranging from \$4,500 to \$15,000, to 29 additional school districts. This year a number of high schools are likely to participate in the program.*

*Block scheduling* provides students with additional learning time by increasing the amount of time devoted to core subject areas and decreasing the time spent changing classes. For example, standard schedules typically provide six to seven 45-minute periods daily, while block scheduling can provide four 90 minute periods daily. The increase in class time provides more time for projects and hands-on activities that motivate students and allow them to engage more deeply with the material they are learning. More instructional time also facilitates differentiated instruction. After a whole group lesson the teacher can plan small group work and provide individualized support for students who need extra help.

Extended learning time programs can also take place outside of the school day, either *after school or during the summer*. Programs that take place outside of the school day are often designed to help students improve their academic skills and to provide the students with both academic and personal enrichment in areas schools often do not have time to address. They also provide a variety of services including academic instruction and tutoring, social, health, and career-oriented services. Programs can be provided by the school or by community organizations. The programs have the potential to reach disengaged, older youth and those in danger of dropping out of school. They also have the potential to help students transition from middle school to high school and from high school to college or work.

Extended learning time programs are also a potential strategy for providing transition programs to ninth grade students. Transition programs prepare elementary and middle

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<sup>22</sup> Janet Quint, *Meeting Five Critical Challenges of High School Reform*, (New York, NY: MDRC 2006)

school students to succeed in high-level courses when they reach ninth grade and help ninth graders develop the skills they need to be successful in a demanding high school program. Providing transition programs during the summer allows school systems to invest significant time, resources, and attention in the students who need it most and prepare them to be successful in high school.

As noted above, a wide range of structural changes that alter and expand the use of instructional time can be effective strategies for helping students achieve at higher levels. Such programs, however, are not effective without strong curricula and instruction.

#### **LOUISIANA**

##### ***“Double-Dose” Instruction***

*Louisiana is piloting a “catch-up” program in thirty high schools across the state. These pilot schools are providing “double-dose” instruction in reading and math using accelerated curricula that have been reviewed externally. The state has provided professional development to all teachers participating in the program and is providing technical assistance to participating schools. The state has assigned students to treatment and control groups in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.*

### **What the Research Says**

A number of studies have shown that extended learning time programs have been associated with increased academic achievement, engagement, and attendance.<sup>23</sup> A recent research synthesis on schools’ use of time conducted by the Education Sector demonstrates that these programs have the potential to close the achievement gap and increase student achievement, particularly for low performing and high poverty students. Programs that produce gains in academic achievement, however, are those that provide high quality instruction and that use the time to engage students in learning.

Summer programs in particular have been found to be effective in helping at-risk students catch up academically. “Summer learning programs that are highly structured, provide individual and small group instruction, and focus on reading and math skills can have a great impact on students attending low-performing or high poverty schools.”<sup>24</sup>

Extended learning time programs are also effective in helping ninth graders prepare to succeed in high school. A rigorous, independent evaluation of Talent Development High Schools, a comprehensive reform model, found that semester-long “catch-up” courses in reading and mathematics helped increase the number of students passing standards-based English and Algebra classes.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Council of Chief State School Officers, *Extended Learning Opportunities, A Policy Statement of the Council of Chief State School Officers*, (Washington, DC: Author, 2006); American Youth Policy Forum, *Helping Youth Succeed Through Out of School Time Programs*, (Washington, DC: Author, 2006); Elena Silva, *On the Clock: Rethinking the Way Schools Use Time* (Washington, DC: Education Sector, 2007)

<sup>24</sup> CCSSO, 2006

<sup>25</sup> Quint, 2006

### **State Policy Options**

- *Target high-need districts and schools for extended learning time programs.* States could provide funding for extending the school day, providing after school programs, and/or providing summer enrichment programs. High-need districts could design programs that fit their particular school culture and the needs of their students. Options include tutoring programs for students with low literacy skills and after school academic enrichment programs to develop critical thinking skills and creativity.
- *Develop ninth grade transition programs to ensure ninth graders are prepared to succeed in high school.* States could fund summer or extended learning time programs to help incoming ninth graders prepare to succeed in high school.

**III. Personalized learning environments** engage, motivate, and support each student and are recognized as a critical feature of high school redesign, and one that has been found to be particularly effective for at-risk students. By transforming the school culture into one that is student-centered, the school becomes focused on identifying and addressing student needs with the supports and resources each student needs to develop, both academically and personally. Strategies for creating personalized learning environments include reorganizing or creating new school structures that provide smaller learning communities; providing more individualized support systems; and, developing an academically challenging curriculum and instructional program that helps students make the connection between academic content and the “real world.”

One of the distinguishing characteristics of personalized learning environments is strong, supportive relationships between students and adults. These relationships are critical to ensuring that all students get the support they need and develop a sense of belonging to the school.<sup>26</sup> Most high schools, however, are organized in ways that make it difficult for adults to know students well. One strategy for creating personalized learning environments is *restructuring the size and organization* of high schools so that students learn and have individualized attention from adults who are trained to recognize and address their specific needs.<sup>27</sup> School restructuring may include developing smaller learning communities within larger schools or developing new, small schools.<sup>28</sup>

#### **OREGON**

##### ***Education Plan and Education Profile***

*All Oregon students in grades seven through twelve are responsible for developing and managing an Education Plan and Education Profile. The Education Plan helps students define academic and career interests and goals, and a process for achieving them. Within the plan, students identify the necessary courses, learning experiences, assessments, and other tools and resources they need to achieve their goals and reflect on progress towards meeting their goals. Parents/guardians, school personnel, and community partners provide support and guidance to students in implementing their plans. The Education Profile documents students' academic achievement, progress towards meeting state standards and other personal and academic accomplishments. The plan and profile are part of the state's comprehensive guidance and counseling program.*

Another strategy for personalization is to create *individualized support systems*. Some schools lay the foundation for this by creating individual learning plans for each student that map out the curriculum, supports, and other activities they will need to achieve their academic, personal, and post-secondary goals. The process of creating individual learning plans also helps engage students in their own development, a critical component in their success. Some schools have advisory structures to develop the individual learning plans and to provide the ongoing advising and personal advocacy that students need over time. These advisory structures pair students with the same faculty member and/or a team that includes family and community members for the duration of their high school years.

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<sup>26</sup> National Association for Secondary School Principals, *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform*, (Reston, VA: Author, 2004)

<sup>27</sup> National High School Alliance, *Increasing Academic Rigor in High Schools, Network Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership, 2006)

<sup>28</sup> National High School Alliance, 2006

Finally, schools establish a personalized learning environment by developing an academically challenging curricular and instructional program that makes learning more relevant for students by *connecting academic content to real-world problems*. Some national policy and research organizations suggest strategies that make these connections explicit as a tool for re-engaging at-risk and all students. These strategies include incorporating internships into the school year, providing career and technical education that is integrated with academic content, developing curricula that reflects current and projected workforce needs, and incorporating a more practical, skills-based approach to learning into high school. Models include career academies and career and technical education programs. Schools organized around career pathways may include standard, academic courses, courses related to a particular career cluster, courses that blend both academic and work skills, internships, and partnerships with employers that provide other work-related experiences.

**KENTUCKY**  
**Individual Learning Plan**

*Kentucky has recently converted its paper-based Individual Graduation Plan to a web-based Individual Learning Plan. The plan helps secondary students (grades six through twelve) design an individual program of study that prepares them to meet their college and career goals. The plan also provides students with a variety of web-based tools and resources including opportunities for exploring careers and higher education, establishing personal and educational goals, creating and revising resumes, and tracking extra-curricular activities.*

Career academies provide one promising model for contextualizing learning. These schools are smaller learning communities within larger high schools that are organized around a particular career theme.<sup>29</sup> Career themes incorporate a range of related occupations within a particular field and are chosen based on the needs of the local economy. Students take several classes within the academy and their remaining classes in the larger high school. Teachers remain with students from year-to-year, enabling them to develop a more personal relationship with students.

Successful career and technical education (CTE) programs have integrated vocational requirements and academic standards to ensure that students are prepared for both college and career.<sup>30</sup> Students in vocational programs of study are now taking more rigorous academic courses in addition to their vocational courses.<sup>31</sup>

The High Schools that Work Initiative is a promising model of incorporating career and technical education within a framework of rigorous academic instruction. The curriculum consists of a college preparatory core of English, mathematics, science, and social

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<sup>29</sup> James Kemple, *Career Academies, Impacts on Labor Market Outcomes and Educational Attainment*, (New York, NY: MDRC, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Plank, Stefanie DeLuca, Angela Estacion, *Dropping Out of High School and the Place of Career and Technical Education: A Survival Analysis of Surviving High School*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University and St. Paul, MN: National Research Center for Career and Technical Education, University of Minnesota, 2005)

<sup>31</sup> Marsha Silverberg, Elizabeth Warner, Michael Fong, and David Goodwin, *National Assessment of Vocational Education, Final Report to Congress, Executive Summary*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2004)

studies, and at least four courses in an academic or career/technical major.<sup>32</sup> The model also includes work-based learning activities planned by teachers, employers and students.<sup>33</sup> These activities may include internships, site visits, or real world projects based on workplace needs.<sup>34</sup>

### What the Research Says

Research studies on several strategies that help schools establish personalized learning environments have found positive impacts for student outcomes: small learning communities; career academies; and, career and technical education programs.

*Small learning communities* can improve teacher student relationships and make students feel known and cared about.<sup>35</sup> They also tend to improve school climate.<sup>36</sup> However, small learning communities will not increase student achievement without other reforms that address the quality of curricula and instruction.<sup>37</sup> Further, many smaller learning communities are not fully implemented, inhibiting their potential impact.

Research conducted on *career academies* indicates that students' participation in career awareness activities and work internships during high school results in higher future earnings.<sup>38</sup> Other research suggests positive impacts for students most at risk of dropping out of high school. For this group, the academies "reduced dropout rates, improved attendance, increased academic course-taking, and increased the likelihood of earning enough credits to graduate on time."<sup>39</sup> The research also suggests that attention to the academic component of the career academy is necessary to improve student achievement and preparation for college.<sup>40</sup>

The National Assessment of Vocational Education (NAVE) and other studies have found that *Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs* can have a positive impact on earnings and postsecondary transition rates,<sup>41</sup> particularly for CTE students who completed a rigorous college preparatory curriculum.<sup>42</sup> A study based on national, longitudinal data found that CTE programs can reduce the likelihood of dropping out for students who are of normal age for their grade.<sup>43</sup> For older students, CTE had no

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<sup>32</sup> Southern Regional Education Board, High Schools that Work, Key Practices and Conditions, Alignment with the 11 CSR Components, April 2007, available from <http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/specialnetworks/csr/AlignmentWithCSRComponents.asp>; Internet

<sup>33</sup> Southern Regional Education Board, 2007

<sup>34</sup> Gene Bottoms, *1998 Outstanding Practices: Raising Student Achievement by Focusing on Ten Key Practices*, (Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board, 1998)

<sup>35</sup> Quint, 2006

<sup>36</sup> Quint, 2006

<sup>37</sup> Quint, 2006

<sup>38</sup> Quint, 2006

<sup>39</sup> Kemple and Snipes, 2000

<sup>40</sup> Quint, 2006

<sup>41</sup> Silverberg et al, 2004; David Neumark and Donna Rothstein, "School to Career programs and transitions to employment," *Economics of Education Review*, 25: 374-393

<sup>42</sup> Silverberg et al, 2004

<sup>43</sup> Plank et al, 2005

impact.<sup>44</sup> In addition, career and technical education was only effective in dropout prevention up to a point—the ideal ratio appeared to be 1:2 CTE to academic courses.<sup>45</sup>

### State Policy Options

- *Expand access to promising school models for high-need districts.* As many states are already doing with sizeable foundation and federal government support, states could target high-need districts for expanded access to promising models that create smaller, more personalized learning environments, such as career academies, and small, theme-based schools. Particular attention to high quality implementation and ensuring academic rigor are necessary for successful programs.
- *Develop, evaluate, and expand access to contextualized curricula in high-need districts.* States could support schools and districts in developing curricula that emphasize project-based learning and other engaging, inquiry-based teaching methods that provide opportunities for students to master academic content, learn workforce skills, and develop personal strengths.
- *Fund CTE programs that are academically rigorous and focus on the dual goals of college and work preparation.* As is already underway in some states and districts, states could provide targeted funding to districts to develop academically rigorous CTE programs that are aligned with local and global workforce demands.

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<sup>44</sup> Plank et al, 2005

<sup>45</sup> Plank et al, 2005

#### IV. Dropout Prevention and Recovery Programs

Both dropout prevention and dropout recovery programs are critical components in a systemic, comprehensive strategy to support the success of all students. In order to identify and provide resources for those students who are most at-risk, or who have already disengaged from the system, well-articulated programs targeted to serving these populations remain necessary interventions alongside other interventions designed to transform the current system.

*Dropout prevention programs* are typically implemented as one component of a school program or adopted as a major part of a whole-school reform strategy. Promising dropout prevention programs with evidence of effectiveness include the Check and Connect Model, Project Grad USA, and Talent Development High School.

The Check and Connect Model, developed at the University of Minnesota to increase students' engagement in school and prevent dropout, has shown evidence of effectiveness for students with emotional and behavior disabilities in particular<sup>46</sup> The model includes a focus on developing relationships between students and adult monitors or mentors who regularly check on students' attendance, performance and behavior. They then provide individualized interventions and support. The program supports students for at least two years and helps motivate students, teaches them to solve problems, and helps them become involved in school-related activities.

##### **ARIZONA**

##### ***Dropout Prevention Initiative***

*The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) has hired a Dropout Prevention/High School Renewal Director to network with schools, businesses, community organizations, and others to identify effective strategies and programs for improving graduation rates. The Director will identify promising models throughout the state and share them with local education agencies through a statewide conference and web site.*

*ADE has also awarded grants to five providers to serve at-risk students in meeting state standards, graduating, and transitioning to work or higher education. The programs also provide students with opportunities to develop leadership skills and participate in community service.*

Project Grad USA partners with high schools and all of its feeder elementary and middle schools to improve instruction and student motivation.<sup>47</sup> Participating schools adopt the organizations' chosen mathematics, literacy, and classroom management programs. Moreover, in each Project Grad school, social services professionals provide counseling, dropout prevention, and case management services. Each campus also supports a Scholarship Coordinator that helps students graduate and gain access to college.

The Talent Development High School Model, developed by the Johns Hopkins University's Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk, is a comprehensive reform model designed specifically for failing schools. "The model includes organizational and management changes to establish a positive school climate;

<sup>46</sup> The Check and Connect Model, available from <http://ici.umn.edu/checkandconnect/model/default.html#2>; Internet

<sup>47</sup> Project Grad USA, Our Model, available from <http://www.projectgrad.org/site/pp.asp?c=fuLTJeMUKrH&b=869569>; Internet

curricular and instructional innovations to prepare all students for high-level courses in math and English; parent and community involvement to encourage college awareness; and professional development to support the recommended reforms.”

*Dropout recovery programs* are designed to provide alternative pathways for students to earn a high school diploma and develop the skills and knowledge they need to pursue postsecondary education and careers. “Approximately 5.4 million youth ages 16-24 are out of school and out of work.<sup>48</sup>” Without concerted attention, these youth have few prospects for earning a living that will keep them and their families out of poverty. Alternative educational pathways may be designed as alternative schools within a particular district, established solely to meet the needs of disconnected or at-risk youth, or connected to non-profit or community-based organizations. Programs are generally designed to help students achieve a credential—either a high school diploma, GED, postsecondary degree, or an industry certificate. Many successful programs provide contextualized, hands-on learning experiences, substantial individual attention, and a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of students.<sup>49</sup> Programs often provide social and health services and career counseling in addition to educational services. Successful programs often integrate community service and service learning opportunities.<sup>50</sup> Promising dropout recovery programs with state or federal funding include the Commonwealth Corporation’s Diploma Plus High Schools and the YouthBuild program.

**GEORGIA**  
**Graduation Specialists**

*Georgia has provided a grant to every high school in the state to hire a full-time graduation specialist. The primary role of the graduation specialist is to improve graduation rates by identifying students who are at-risk of dropping out, providing them with interventions and support, and helping them develop a plan to graduate and meet their postsecondary goals. Graduation specialists administer a transition program for ninth graders to help them adapt to high school-level academics and will work with students, school faculty, and parents to implement intervention plans. They also recruit and work with outside organizations and agencies to provide additional programs and resources to students.*

Diploma Plus, a program of the Commonwealth Corporation, is an alternative high school model designed for students at-risk of not completing high school and those who have already dropped out.<sup>51</sup> Diploma Plus implements its model both through stand-alone small schools and through alternative “pull-out” programs that serve students for only one to two years. In Diploma Plus schools, graduation is determined by proficiency, not by seat time. The model includes student-centered curriculum designed around key competencies. It also provides college-related coursework and outside internships. Students demonstrate mastery through a portfolio system. Diploma Plus schools exist in several New England states, New York, and California.

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<sup>48</sup> Mala B. Thakur and Kristen Henry, *Financing Alternative Education Pathways, Profiles and Policy*, (Washington, DC: National Youth Employment Coalition, 2005)

<sup>49</sup> Thakur and Henry, 2005; Nancy Martin and Samuel Halperin, *Whatever it Takes, How Twelve Communities are Reconnecting Out of School Youth*, (Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum, 2006)

<sup>50</sup> Thakur and Henry, 2005; Martin and Halperin, 2006

<sup>51</sup> Commonwealth Corporation. Diploma Plus Overview. Available from: <http://www.commcorp.org/diplomaplus/index.html>; Internet.

YouthBuild is a public-private partnership, funded locally through a combination of grants from the federal government, foundations, corporations, and donations. In the program, unemployed and undereducated young people between the ages of 16 and 24 work toward completion of a high school diploma or GED while learning work skills on a construction site, building affordable housing for low-income and homeless people.<sup>52</sup> Key components include housing, education, job training, leadership development, counseling, and graduate support. In 2004, YouthBuild programs existed in 44 states and the District of Columbia, and 21 sites had established charter schools or other arrangements with local school districts, allowing them to access state education dollars. Also in 2004, fifty-nine percent of Youth Build participants completed the program and 80% of these graduates went on to postsecondary education.

### What the Research Says

Long-term studies of traditional dropout prevention programs found that these programs were not particularly effective compared to other available services and interventions.<sup>53</sup> However, many of the interventions studied were based on an old model of remediation in which the programs were disconnected from any broader school-wide strategy to help students achieve to high standards. A number of newer strategies show more promise for improving outcomes for at-risk students. These models include whole school reform models, smaller learning communities, and interventions that provide individualized counseling and academic support services to at-risk students.

A review of dropout prevention programs by the Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse found only one program that had evidence of a positive impact on students' completing school—the Talent Search program.<sup>54</sup> The Talent Search program works to increase high school graduation and college enrollment among low-income and first generation college students.<sup>55</sup> The program provides academic support services, including test taking and study skills instruction, academic advising, and tutoring in addition to college and career counseling and guidance services.<sup>56</sup>

A review of the literature on interventions that raise high school graduation rates in a study conducted by Teachers' College found that few interventions had rigorous evidence of increasing high school graduation rates.<sup>57</sup> Interventions that did increase graduation rates included the Perry Preschool program (an intensive, center-based preschool program including parent meetings and home visits), First Things First (a comprehensive school reform model including small learning communities), class size reduction in grades k-3, the Chicago Child-Parent Center program (a center-based preschool program including parental involvement and outreach), and a 10% increase in

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<sup>52</sup> Martin and Halperin, 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Mark Dynarski and Philip Gleason, *How We Can Help? What We Have Learned from Evaluations of Federal Dropout-Prevention Programs* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1998)

<sup>54</sup> WWC Intervention Report, Dropout Prevention, available from <http://www.whatworks.ed.gov/Topic.asp?tid=06&ReturnPage=default.asp>; Internet

<sup>55</sup> WWC Intervention Report, Dropout Prevention, available from <http://www.whatworks.ed.gov/Topic.asp?tid=06&ReturnPage=default.asp>; Internet

<sup>56</sup> WWC Intervention Report, Dropout Prevention, available from <http://www.whatworks.ed.gov/Topic.asp?tid=06&ReturnPage=default.asp>; Internet

<sup>57</sup> Henry Levin, Clive Belfield, Peter Muennig, and Cecilia Rouse, *The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All of America's Children* (New York, NY: Teachers College, 2007)

teacher salaries for all years K-12. A review by the Government Accounting Office identified three interventions with evaluation findings indicating the potential to improve graduation rates: the Check and Connect program; Project Grad; and the Talent Development High School, each described in the prior section.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, as mentioned earlier in the report, evaluations of career academies have concluded they have a positive impact on students' credit accrual. Taken in combination with the findings that the First Things First and Talent Development models have a positive impact on graduation rates, this research suggests the potential of smaller learning communities and smaller, theme-based schools for improving graduation rates.

### State Policy Options

- *Develop and assess strategic, systemic approaches for addressing both dropout prevention and dropout recovery.* Using early warning systems, states could identify dropouts and those at-risk for dropping out in order to connect them with dropout prevention programs. Since the research does not provide conclusive evidence about which approaches are most effective, ongoing assessment of programs will be critical to implementing effective programs.
- *Develop funding models for supporting dropout recovery programs.* Many alternative education programs dedicated to serving dropouts have a difficult time finding a secure source of funding. These programs are often not funded through the same mechanisms, such as the "average daily attendance" formula, that provide per pupil funds for students in the school system. Options for financing these programs are identified in *Financing Alternative Education Pathways, Profiles and Policy*, a report from the National Youth Employment Coalition (2005).

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<sup>58</sup> Government Accounting Office, *No Child Left Behind Act, Education Could Do More to Help States Better Define Graduation Rates and Improve Knowledge about Intervention Strategies* (Washington, DC: Author, 2005)

**IV. Incorporating literacy instruction into the curriculum** is another important strategy for helping struggling students. Students who are poor readers are more likely to struggle academically in all subjects and are more likely to drop out of school. Many school systems end literacy instruction after elementary school and by high school, expect students to read to learn, rather than helping them learn to read. By incorporating literacy instruction into the curriculum, schools can improve students' reading skills, performance in all subject areas, and ultimately, improve educational attainment. A few states have developed statewide literacy initiatives that help schools and districts adopt a comprehensive approach to improving literacy instruction across the curriculum. State programs typically provide professional development to participating schools, use reading coaches or experts to work with teachers to improve instruction, and incorporate a school-wide emphasis on literacy across the curriculum.

#### **ALABAMA**

##### ***Alabama Reading Initiative***

*The Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) has a number of key components. Participating schools must agree to become a literacy demonstration site and must commit to a goal of 100% literacy among students. At least 85% of a site's faculty must participate in a two-week professional development institute focusing on reading instruction and ongoing professional development throughout the year. Schools must appoint full-time reading coaches to work with teachers and students. Finally, schools must collaborate with higher education faculty partners, and businesses.*

#### **OHIO**

##### ***Striving Readers' Grant***

*The Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) has partnered with the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and Ohio State University to address the needs of secondary students within the state's juvenile corrections facilities. The grant will allow DYS to implement Scholastic's Read 180 intervention program to incarcerated youth in a variety of instructional settings. DYS will implement the State Institute for Reading Instruction model, a 25-hour professional development workshop, to train the program's literacy coaches and administrators.*

### **What the Research Says**

There are a number of comprehensive reviews of research on effective reading instruction.<sup>59</sup> All of these group reading instruction into the following categories: decoding and word knowledge; reading fluency; vocabulary; comprehension; motivation; and, effective instructional strategies for teaching these skills.

A descriptive study of the Alabama Reading Initiative's implementation at the secondary level provides several lessons for policymakers: states should be prepared to design flexible models of reading instruction that can be tailored to student needs at the local level; states should develop partnerships among teachers, administrators, and schools to develop a common framework for providing a coherent instructional program from K-12; teachers and schools need consistent support from literacy specialists; and states

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<sup>59</sup> See for example, Catherine E. Snow, M. Susan Burns, and Peg Griffin, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1998) and RAND Reading Study Group, *Reading for Understanding: Toward a RAND Program in Reading Comprehension* (Santa Monica, CA.: Author, 2002).

should be attuned to the state and national policy environment and opportunities to seek funding from external sources.<sup>60</sup>

### State Policy Options

- *Develop state-wide literacy programs built on research about effective reading instruction.* States could develop adolescent literacy programs based on effective instructional strategies identified in several comprehensive reviews of research about effective reading instruction. They could also design their models based on examples and lessons learned from other states that have already developed state-wide literacy programs.
- *Provide professional development in literacy instruction for high school teachers.* High school teachers need to learn how to teach literacy skills concurrently with their subject areas in order to help all students improve their literacy skills.
- *Develop literacy standards for high school students and regularly assess progress towards meeting them.* These standards would help states evaluate students' literacy skills and develop strategies for improving them. They would also provide benchmarks for a state-wide literacy program.

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<sup>60</sup> Amy Bacevich and Terry Salinger, *Lessons and Recommendations from the Alabama Reading Initiative: Sustaining Focus on Secondary Reading*, (Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research, 2006)

### **Interventions in Context: Developing a Comprehensive Plan for Change**

In this report, the National High School Alliance recommends a range of state policy options based on our analysis of research and the literature of national policy and research organizations. The interventions that these policies support, however, cannot be effective unless they are part of a broader agenda to transform the entire school culture as it relates to learning, teaching, supports, expectations, and relationships among students and adults. These strategies must also be part of a comprehensive plan with the objective of ensuring that all students are ready for post-secondary education, careers, and active civic participation. This objective is at the center of the Alliance's framework, *A Call to Action: Transforming High School for All Youth*. The framework identifies a set of six core principles and recommended strategies for redesigning high schools. The core principles are as follows:

- Personalized learning environments
- Academic engagement of all students
- Empowered educators
- Accountable leaders
- Engaged community and youth
- Integrated system of high standards, curriculum, instruction, assessments, and supports

This framework represents the collective knowledge of the Alliance's partner organizations based on research and practice. It provides state, district, and school leaders with a tool for planning, implementing, mobilizing public support, and ongoing assessment of a comprehensive approach to transforming high schools for all youth.

State leaders can ensure a comprehensive approach to improving outcomes for all youth through policies that include resources directed explicitly to address the needs of its most at-risk students. Indiana and Virginia provide examples of such policy in the context of a state-wide high school reform agenda (see pages 23 - 26).

### ***Academic Interventions in Indiana***

In 2005 and 2006, Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels signed legislation that enacted a number of programs and strategies to increase graduation rates. These programs include dropout prevention and recovery strategies and dual enrollment programs.

Most students in Indiana are now required to attend school until age 18—students between the ages of 16 -18 are required to have approval from their parents and principals in order to drop out. If students drop out without permission, they can lose their work permits and driving privileges. Students truant from school for 10 days also lose their work permits.

All eighth-grade students in Indiana develop a **flexible career plan** that indicates the students' areas of interest, the courses needed for graduation, and the students' goals. Schools are required to review students' plans each year and provide supports and services to students who are not making adequate progress towards graduation.

**School Flex** is a dropout prevention program that serves at-risk eleventh and twelfth grade students. The state has developed eligibility criteria to ensure the program is targeted to the most at-risk students. Criteria include failing the state's graduation exam at least twice, being chronically absent, and being significantly behind in credits. Students in the program are enrolled in high school part time and may work or take postsecondary educational courses part time. While participating in the program, students continue to earn credits towards graduation and must maintain a 95% attendance rate and not be expelled or suspended.

**Fast Track** allows state colleges and universities to offer high school completion programs for students ages 17 years or older. Participating students earn a high school diploma while enrolled in an associate's degree or certificate program. School districts pay tuition for the high school courses taken by participating students who are 17-18 years old. Students are able to transfer their high school credits to the program. In order to receive a high school diploma, students must pass the state graduation exam or an approved equivalent and complete the requirements for Indiana's General Diploma and the requirements of the college and university.

**Double-Up** allows colleges and universities to develop partnerships with schools to offer early college, dual credit, and dual enrollment opportunities to eleventh and twelfth grade students. Partnerships jointly develop admissions requirements and course fees. Colleges and universities must waive tuition for participating low-income students and can offer financial assistance to other students as well. In addition, as part of the National Governors Association Honor State grant, the state awarded a number of grants of \$50,000 to school districts to develop early college high school programs.

Indiana has also begun collecting more comprehensive data to inform its efforts. High schools must report student suspensions, dropouts, work permits revoked, driving permits revoked, School Flex enrollees, and freshmen not earning enough credits to become sophomores.

Finally, the state has created an action group to develop a plan for addressing students who are disengaged from school. The plan is focused on a number of areas of

prevention, including redesign, readiness, relevance, rigor, and relationships. The group consists of an elementary, middle, and high school principal, representatives from the state department of education, and the state's high school redesign coordinator. The group plans to engage community members and representatives from the state and local business communities in its next phase of work.

## ***Academic Interventions in Virginia***

Virginia has designed a variety of intervention services and programs to improve the academic performance of at-risk students throughout their high school careers and increase graduation rates. These programs include the Algebra Readiness Initiative, Project Graduation, Senior Year Plus, and the Honor Schools.

### **Algebra Readiness Initiative**

Virginia's interventions begin by targeting students even before they reach high school with the Algebra Readiness Initiative (ARI). ARI provides funding for school divisions to provide intervention services to students who are at-risk of failing Algebra I. ARI consists of a diagnostic pre-test, an intervention service that provides 2.5 hours of instruction per week, and a post-test to assess progress. Students receive intensive instruction—all classes maintain a 1:10 teacher-student ratio. School divisions identify students in grades six through nine for participation based on their performance in previous interventions, performance in mathematics, performance on end-of-course assessments, and performance on diagnostic assessments.

### **Senior Year Plus**

Senior Year Plus provides two types of postsecondary-level opportunities to engage students in their last year of high school—the Early College Scholars and Path to Industry Certification: High School Industry Credentialing.

#### *Early College Scholars*

The Early College Scholars program allows participating high school seniors to earn up to 15 hours of college credit while completing their high school diploma. Students earn college credits through dual-enrollment programs or by taking Advanced Placement courses at their home high schools or through the Virginia Virtual Advanced Placement School. In support of its dual enrollment program, the state has defined a set of core college level academic courses that transfer as core requirements and degree credits at Virginia colleges and universities.

To participate in the Early College Scholars program, high school seniors must have a “B” average or better, pursue an Advanced Studies Diploma, and take college-level course work that allows them to earn 15 college credits. Participating students and their parent or guardian must sign an agreement that outlines the requirements of the program.

#### *Path to Industry Certification: High School Industry Credentialing*

The Path to Industry Certification allows students to work towards an industry credential or state license while pursuing a high school diploma. Students, who earn credentials by passing a certification or licensure examination, may use the credential to fulfill the state's graduation requirement for up to two verified credits (credits earned by passing a state exam in a particular subject area). Credentials include industry certification programs, pathway examinations that lead to credentials, state-issued licenses, or occupational competency exams.

### **Project Graduation**

Project Graduation was designed to help students prepare for the Standards of Learning (SOL) exams that students must pass in order to graduate from high school. The

program includes regional academies (held during the summer and school year), online tutorials or courses in SOL subject areas, and practice tests. School divisions apply for state grants to serve students in need of additional support to pass SOL exams and choose appropriate Project Graduation activities to meet their needs. The state grant application recommends that priority be given to students in subgroups with low graduation rates.

### **NGA Honor Schools**

Through its NGA grant, the state is piloting a number of intervention strategies in 30 high schools with higher than average ninth grade retention rates. In these schools, administrators and staff are developing strategies designed to decrease ninth and tenth grade retention rates, increase graduation rates, and better prepare students for college.

Honor schools have the opportunity to expand their Project Graduation and Algebra Readiness programs, develop and implement transition plans aimed at reducing the number of ninth and tenth grade students retained in grade, to support PSSS and PSAT testing, and increase students' participation in the state's Early College Scholars and Path to Industry Certification programs. Honor schools may participate in a college awareness project coordinated by the Virginia Community College System and the State Council of Higher Education. Schools are also given transition grants to test strategies that decrease ninth grade retention and dropouts. Schools are testing strategies such as personalized graduation plans and study guides for ninth and tenth graders, ninth grade transition programs, extended learning opportunities for ninth graders, and providing career coaches.

### Summary of State Policy Options

In this report, the National High School Alliance recommends a range of state policy options based on an analysis of research and the literature of national policy and research organizations. To provide an “at-a-glance” review of these options, and to help policymakers approach these options as potential “policy levers,” they are grouped below into three major thematic categories: data systems; structural changes; and, curriculum and instruction.

Theme	Policy Lever
Data Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Support the development of early warning systems and use longitudinal data to identify high needs schools.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Develop and assess strategic, systemic approaches for addressing both dropout prevention and dropout recovery.</i></li> </ul>
Structural Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Target high needs districts and schools for extended learning time programs.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Develop ninth grade transition programs to ensure ninth graders are prepared to succeed in high school.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Expand access to promising school models for high-need districts.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Develop funding models for supporting dropout recovery programs.</i></li> </ul>
Curriculum and Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Provide professional development to teachers and principals to help them meet the needs of struggling students.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Provide accelerated learning grants to support partnerships between districts and institutions of higher education.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Develop, evaluate, and expand access to contextualized curricula in high-need districts.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Fund CTE programs that are academically rigorous and focus on the dual goals of college and work preparation.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Develop statewide literacy programs built on research about effective reading instruction.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Provide professional development in literacy instruction for high school teachers.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Develop literacy standards for high school students and regularly assess progress towards meeting them.</i></li> </ul>

### Data Systems

- *Support the development of early warning systems and use longitudinal data to identify high needs schools.* States could provide funding and technical assistance to individual districts and groups of districts to develop early warning data systems that identify at-risk students before they begin failing classes or drop out of school. States could also use longitudinal data systems to identify schools with high dropout rates and low achievement for additional resources and support.
- *Develop and assess strategic, systemic approaches for addressing both dropout prevention and dropout recovery.* Using early warning systems, states could identify

dropouts and those at-risk for dropping out in order to connect them with dropout prevention programs. Since the research does not provide conclusive evidence about which approaches are most effective, ongoing assessment of programs will be critical to implementing effective programs.

### **Structural Changes**

- *Target high needs districts and schools for extended learning time programs.* States could provide funding for extending the school day, providing after school programs, and/or providing summer enrichment programs. High needs districts could design programs that fit their particular school culture and the needs of their students. Options include tutoring programs for students with low literacy skills and after school academic enrichment programs to develop critical thinking skills and creativity.
- *Develop ninth grade transition programs to ensure ninth graders are prepared to succeed in high school.* States could fund summer or extended learning time programs to help incoming ninth graders prepare to succeed in high school.
- *Expand access to promising school models for high-need districts.* As many states are already doing with sizeable foundation and federal government support, states could target high-need districts for expanded access to promising models that create smaller, more personalized learning environments, such as career academies, and small, theme-based schools. Particular attention to high quality implementation and ensuring academic rigor are necessary for successful programs.
- *Develop funding models for supporting dropout recovery programs.* Many alternative education programs dedicated to serving dropouts have a difficult time finding a secure source of funding. These programs are often not funded through the same mechanisms, such as the “average daily attendance” formula, that provide per pupil funds for students in the school system. Options for financing these programs are identified in *Financing Alternative Education Pathways, Profiles and Policy*, a report from the National Youth Employment Coalition (2005).

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

- *Develop statewide literacy programs built on research about effective reading instruction.* States could develop adolescent literacy programs based on effective instructional strategies identified in several comprehensive reviews of research about effective reading instruction. They could also design their models based on examples and lessons learned from other states that have already developed statewide literacy programs.
- *Provide professional development in literacy instruction for high school teachers.* High school teachers need to learn how to teach literacy skills concurrently with their subject areas in order to help all students improve their literacy skills.
- *Develop literacy standards for high school students and regularly assess progress towards meeting them.* These standards would help states evaluate students’ literacy skills and develop strategies for improving them. They would also provide benchmarks for a statewide literacy program.

- *Provide professional development to teachers and principals to help them meet the needs of struggling students.* None of the strategies described in this brief can be successful without the support of effective teachers. States should support districts and schools in providing professional development to teachers in using these methods and strategies to help struggling students.
- *Provide accelerated learning grants to support partnerships between districts and institutions of higher education.* States could offer grants to districts that partner with colleges or universities to develop early college high schools, middle colleges, and dual enrollment programs. States could provide start up funding and technical assistance for the development of these programs and provide tuition for student participants.
- *Develop, evaluate, and expand access to contextualized curricula in high-need districts.* States could support schools and districts in developing curricula that emphasize project-based learning and other engaging, inquiry-based teaching methods that provide opportunities for students to master academic content, learn workforce skills, and develop personal strengths.
- *Fund CTE programs that are academically rigorous and focus on the dual goals of college and work preparation.* As is already underway in some states and districts, states could provide targeted funding to districts to develop academically rigorous CTE programs that are aligned with local and global workforce demands.

***For more information about resources and organizations with expertise in assisting states in providing academic interventions, please contact the National High School Alliance at [hsalliance@iel.org](mailto:hsalliance@iel.org) or go to our website at [www.hsalliance.org](http://www.hsalliance.org).***

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## Partners of the National High School Alliance

### National Research and Policy Organizations

Achieve, Inc.  
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American Youth Policy Forum  
Annenberg Institute for School Reform  
Association for Career and Technical Education  
Association for Supervision and Curriculum  
Development  
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation  
Carnegie Corporation of New York  
Center on Education Policy  
CORD  
Education Development Center  
Education Trust  
Institute for Educational Leadership  
Jobs for the Future  
KnowledgeWorks Foundation  
MDRC  
  
National Council of La Raza  
National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades  
Reform  
Pathways to College Network

### State Leaders

Council of Chief State School Officers  
National Association of State Boards of Education  
National Association of State Directors of Career  
Technical Education  
  
National Association of State Directors of Special  
Education  
National Conference of State Legislatures

### District & School Leaders

American Federation of Teachers  
Buck Institute for Education  
College Board  
Consortium on Chicago School Research

Middle College National Consortium  
National Association of Secondary School  
Principals  
National Career Academy Coalition  
National Education Association  
National Staff Development Council  
New England Association of Schools and  
Colleges, Commission on Public Secondary  
Schools

### Community & Youth Leaders

Chicago Community Trust  
Forum for Youth Investment  
National League of Cities  
National Youth Employment Coalition  
Public Education Network  
Rural School and Community Trust  
What Kids Can Do

### Technical Assistance Providers

Academy for Educational Development, Schools  
for a New Society  
Career Academy Support Network, UC Berkeley  
Center for the Social Organization of Schools,  
Talent Development High School  
Coalition of Essential Schools  
Commonwealth Corporation  
Cristo Rey Network  
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Institute for Research and Reform in Education,  
First Things First  
National Academy Foundation  
National Center on Education and the Economy,  
America's Choice High Schools  
  
Project GRAD USA  
  
Southern Regional Education Board, High Schools  
That Work



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