

# Dropout Prevention, Retention and Graduation Initiative A Model for Supporting Student Success

Cammy Lehr, PhD.  
September 18, 2009

Access to Education for Pregnant and Parenting Students



## Dropout Prevention Initiative

---

## Dropout Prevention, Retention and Graduation Initiative

*September of 2005; Minnesota & New Hampshire received a School Dropout Prevention grant from the U.S. Department of Education*

*Added Arizona and Texas in April, 2006*

---

## Context

- Why is it important to prevent youth from dropping out of school?
- Responses are many and varied based on our experience and the lens through which we view life
- Most agree...
  - Completing school opens the door of opportunity for children
  - In recent decades, the importance of a high school diploma has increased

---

## Consequences...

- The consequences of systemic failure to ensure graduation for all of our youth is significant for society and for the youth who leave school early.
  - Young people who do not achieve this milestone are
    - less likely to be employed or are underemployed
    - earn less over the course of their lifetime
    - less likely to pursue post secondary education
    - less likely to be able to give back to their community
-

## More than raising graduating rates...

- Raise rates of school completion
- Engage children and youth in school & learning
- Help students gain the knowledge and skills needed to meet life's challenges beyond high school

### Key Goal of the Initiative

- Develop a comprehensive dropout prevention model that can be used to meet the needs of the students served
-

## Participants in the Initiative

- Participating high schools and middle schools from the following seven districts:
  - Brooklyn Center
  - Duluth
  - Hibbing
  - Park Rapids
  - Red Lake
  - Richfield
  - St. Paul

---

## Build on a Solid Foundation

What do we know that is research-based to help inform good decision making when we are putting programs and strategies in place to improve school completion?

Research Base

---

## Student engagement has emerged as the bottom line in preventing dropout

- Dropping out is a process of disengagement
  - attendance, behavior, academic performance)
- Key is to engage students early on
  - Enter school ready to learn (early intervention)
- Contextual keys to engaging students:
  - Providing effective instruction – evidence-based/best practice,
  - Creating cultural match/relevance – utilize strategies that are appropriate to student background and culture

(Alexander, Entwisle & Kabbani, 2001; Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr & Hurley, 2000; Cotton & Conklin, 2001; Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Finn, 1993; Payne, 2005)

## Cultural Match and Relevance

What does it look like?

- Respecting and honoring culture
- Listening and learning
- Understanding the ways of the community
- Having some knowledge of the history of the culture and considering the impact of historical experience on issues of today
- Providing instruction relevant to the student's culture

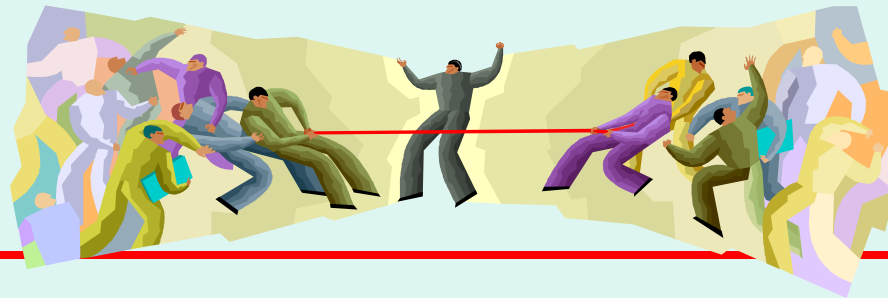
(What are cultural expectations, stigma/harassment, celebration, safety issues????)

---

## Rethinking the Causes of High School Dropout

(Jordan, McPartland & Lara, 1999)

- **Push effects** – situations or experiences within the school environment that aggravate feelings of alienation, failure and dropout (e.g., suspension, negative school climate, discouragement, lack of school support, attendance policies, setting)
- **Pull effects** – factors external to the school environment that weaken or distract from the importance of school completion (e.g., pregnancy, chemical dependency, employment/money)



# Implications

---

## Approach and Programming Must Facilitate Student Engagement

- Access to services and child care
  - Flexible scheduling
  - Attendance policies
  - Physical accommodations
  - Outreach to re-enroll students
  - Individual graduation plans
-

---

## Dropout Prevention, Graduation and Retention Initiative

### The Model

(see blue graphic)

---

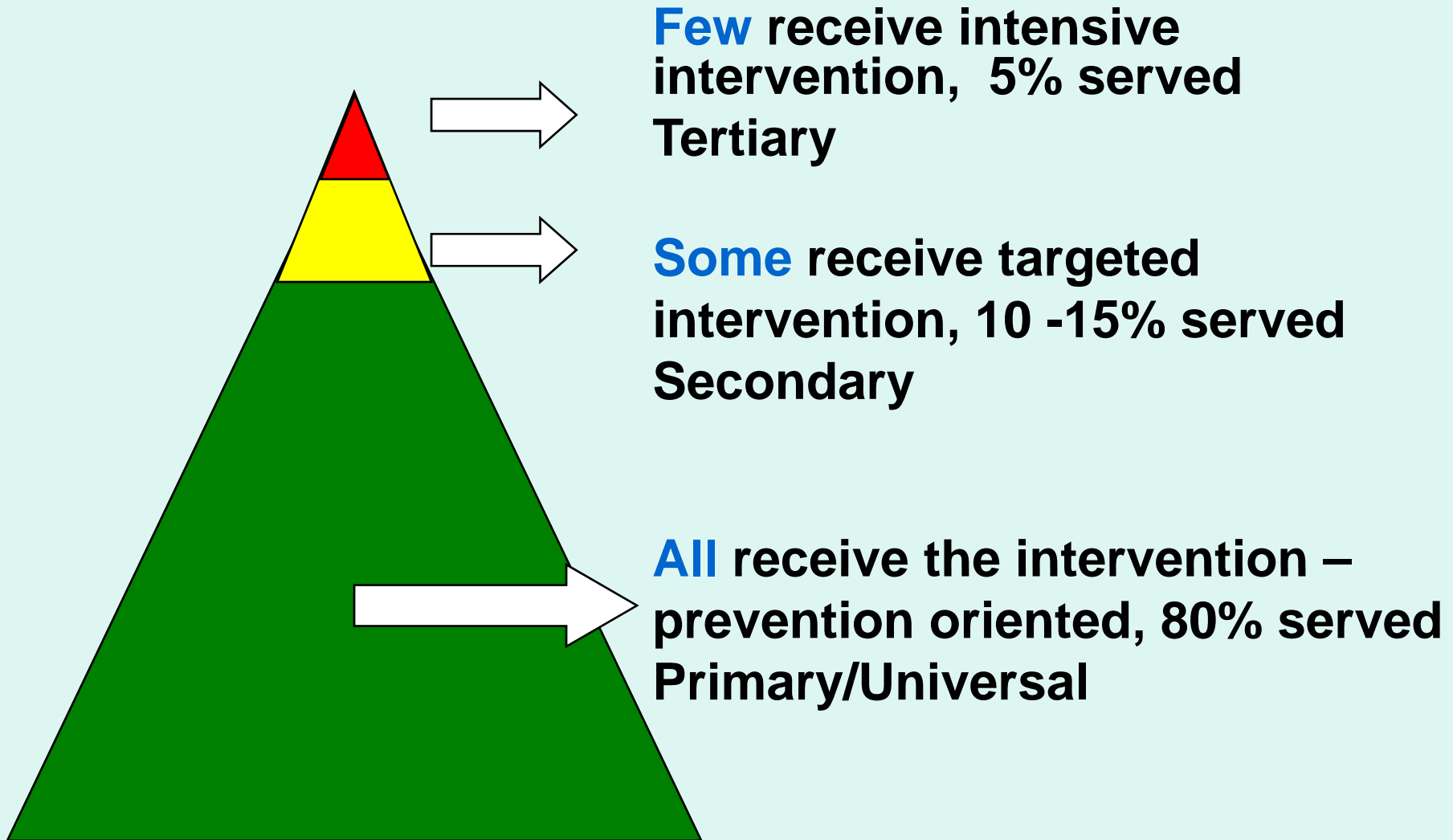
## Checklist 1: Getting Started

- Establish local leadership team membership
- Develop a communication plan
- Plan and provide professional development (early orientation)
- Exploration: key issue “do we agree all students should be given the opportunity and can graduate?”
- Identify other groups in your school and community already working on activities related to dropout prevention (resource mapping)

## Gather data to inform programming decisions (total and disaggregated by groups)

- Student enrollment
  - Graduation rate
  - Attendance rate
  - Dropout rate
  - Additional data linked to risk factors (disciplinary referrals, numbers of suspensions, percentages of students failing classes or behind in credits, students with chemical dependency)
-

# Work with Students at a Variety of Levels



---

## Levels of Intervention

- Universal – primary prevention, includes all youth, low cost per individual (systemic positive discipline program)
  - Secondary – prevention/intervention, includes about 15% who are identified as being at risk of dropout, moderate cost (programs that work to build specific skills)
  - Tertiary – intervention, includes 5% of youth exhibiting clear signs of early school leaving, high need, high cost (intensive wrap-around services)
-

# Key Lessons Learned

## *Supporting Students Placed At-Risk*

- 2.1 Ensure the **discussion of and movement towards cultural competence for all educators, support staff, administrators** and others working with youth in school. Cultural competence is embodied by commitment to open-mindedness, confrontation of stereotypical thinking and the creation of an atmosphere of care and concern for all students.
  - 2.2 Establish and maintain an **ongoing exchange of information between parents, families and school staff.**
  - 2.3 **Emphasize the important role that parent support** can play in student learning (inside and outside of school) and encourage a focus on family engagement in student learning.
  - 2.4 **Utilize research based dropout prevention strategies** designed to increase student engagement in school and learning such as after-school activities, mentoring, tutoring, service learning, alternative learning programs, and safe learning environments...
-

---

## *Supporting Students Placed At-Risk*

- 2.4 Provide **student centered planning individualized** to meet student needs. Closely monitor students' progress to support students who are disengaging from school.
- 2.5 Provide **supports to students during key transition periods** such as between middle and high school; transition during the year for students new to the school; return to school for students who were suspended; expelled or in care and treatment; and students new to America.
- 2.6 Encourage **school-community collaboration to support programs** and activities that will sustain caring environments inside of and outside of school where youth can develop, learn and thrive.
-

For more information and to view video (*Journey to Completion: Strategies for Success in High School*) go to:

MDE Website

Academic Excellence

Dropout Prevention, Retention, and Graduation Initiative

- [http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Academic\\_Excellence/Dropout\\_Prevent\\_Reten\\_Grad\\_Init/index.html](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Academic_Excellence/Dropout_Prevent_Reten_Grad_Init/index.html)