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In FOCUS

The State Superintendent's Dropout Challenge

The State Superintendent's Dropout Challenge focuses on building an early warning and intervention system to reduce student dropout rates in Michigan. Using research-based supports and interventions students at risk are targeted for support. All schools are encouraged to participate.

State Superintendent's Challenge Aims to Reduce Dropout Rates in Michigan

One out of every four Michigan students will fail to graduate with his or her freshman class this year. This startling statistic led State Superintendent Mike Flanagan to create the Dropout Challenge.

The dropout issue is also the focus of a project called American Graduate, under the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). A recent video report highlights dropout prevention and the efforts of Romeo High School in Detroit:

www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/2011/11/reporters-notepad-american-graduate-detroit.html.

Romeo is one of several schools engaged with the Dropout Challenge and Reaching and Teaching Struggling Learners (RTSL). RTSL is a Dropout Prevention Initiative funded through the Office of Special Education. RTSL Director Leisa Gallagher also serves as the MDE Dropout Prevention Coordinator.

"The simple idea of identifying the warning signs for student dropout is the key, and the challenge is making a difference," Gallagher says.

Three early warning signs—referred to as the A-B-C's (Attendance, Behavior, and Course performance)—can predict a student's dropout risk with 80 percent accuracy and predict four-year graduation rates with 90 percent accuracy. These early warning signs are reliable for all students—including students with individualized education programs (IEPs).

Superintendent's Dropout Challenge

The Superintendent's Dropout Challenge was launched in 2009. The Dropout Challenge encourages districts to take a proactive approach in reducing dropout rates for at-risk students. So far, 1,100 schools—including all of the schools in 142 districts—have signed up for the Dropout Challenge. Participating schools identify 10-15 students with multiple early warning dropout signs (A-B-C's) who are in transitional years and provide those students with research-based supports and interventions to engage them in the curriculum and prevent them from dropping out of school.

Participating Dropout Challenge schools show positive results

using the recommended targeted supports and interventions. "There is an overall nine percent decrease in dropout and a ten percent increase in graduation rates for 300 participating schools compared to nonparticipating high schools," Gallagher says.

Call to Action

The Dropout Challenge has been renewed for the 2011-2012 year. All schools in Michigan are encouraged to join in the efforts to reduce dropout rates. Sign up for the Superintendent's Dropout Challenge by filling out a short electronic survey on the Michigan Department of Education's website at www.michigan.gov.dropoutchallenge.

Related Resources

For more information on the early warning signs:
National High School Center
<http://www.betterhighschools.org/ews.asp>

Related FOCUS on Results
Reaching and Teaching Struggling Learners Initiative: A Whole Student, Whole Building, Whole Team Approach (August 2009)
<http://focus.cenmi.org>