

**School Dropout Indicators, Trends, and
Interventions for School Counselors**

Donna J. Dockery

Virginia Commonwealth University

Abstract

School counselors are expected to develop programs that promote academic success for all students, including those at risk for dropping out of school. Knowledge of key indicators of potential dropouts and current trends in dropout prevention research may assist school counselors in better understanding this complex issue. Implementing recommended intervention strategies including longitudinal tracking systems to more clearly identify students who may later drop out of school, targeted programs for use with individual and groups of students at risk of dropping out, and offering school-wide strategies may help school counselors better meet the needs of potential dropouts.

School Dropout Indicators, Trends, and Interventions for School Counselors

School counselors strive to prepare all students for postsecondary education, work, and life after high school; however, too many students leave school without earning a diploma. Identifying students who might be susceptible to dropping out and providing appropriate interventions to support these students are important challenges facing schools. Effective school counselors may hold key roles in dropout prevention efforts, however, in order to support the successful retention and graduation of all students, they must have an understanding of the trends, factors, and recommended interventions related to dropping out. The purpose of this article is to provide information regarding dropout prevention and how counselors might best be involved in this important effort.

School Dropouts: A National Concern

Historically, large numbers of students dropped out of school before graduation. In the 1940s fewer than half of individuals aged 25-29 earned high school diplomas (Shannon & Bylsma, 2003). National interest in reducing dropout rates increased after the 1950's when earning a diploma was expected and greater numbers of students graduated. Reports such as *The Nation at Risk* (National Commission, 1983) and the National Goals 2000 (1998) initiative raised concerns regarding dropout rates. Legislation such as *No Child Left Behind* (2001), a reauthorization of the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964, focused some attention on increasing graduation rates. Research regarding dropout prevention, however, is severely underfunded compared to the federal dollars

allocated to increasing academic achievement. "One of the unintended consequences of the No Child Left Behind Act and its narrow emphasis on test score results was to encourage high schools to quietly ignore those dropping out – or even actively push out students who would lower the test scores for which schools were being held accountable" (Maclver & Maclver, 2009, p. 4).

Professional school counselors' roles have also evolved to reflect changes in educational systems in the United States. The Smith-Hughes National Vocational Education Act of 1917 provided initial funding for vocational guidance programs and placed the first counselors in high schools (Wright, 2012). Beginning in the 1920s school counselors expanded their role to address educational concerns and social issues, in addition to vocational preparation, an emphasis that continued through the late 1990s (Wright, 2012).

The federal movement towards standards-based education resulted in statewide testing for students while No Child Left Behind requires schools and identified groups of students to meet increasing achievement standards each year. As a result, collecting, interpreting, and analyzing testing data has become an important role of school counselors (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2005), including comparing data disaggregated based on race and ethnicity, English language proficiency, disability, and socioeconomic status.

Formed in 2003, the National Center for Transforming School Counseling advocated for equal access and opportunities for all students enrolled in school (Education Trust, 2009), concepts supported by the ASCA National Model (2005). The ASCA ethical standards also require school counselors to ensure equitable

opportunities for all students, and to use data to help close achievement and opportunity gaps between different groups (2009). Despite these efforts, limited gains have been made towards achieving academic proficiency, and little progress has been made towards closing the achievement gap and increasing graduation rates (Wright, 2012).

Annually, more than a half a million young adults drop out of high school (Dynarski et al., 2008). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the national graduation rate in 2008 was about 75%, with Caucasian and Asian Americans graduating at much higher rates than their Latino, African American, and Native American peers (Stillwell, 2010). Males dropped out at higher rates than females in every state and fewer students who were English language learners, had disabilities, or were from lower socioeconomic backgrounds earned diplomas (Stillwell). Despite recent efforts in improving graduation rates and reducing dropout rates, the numbers have changed little, and determining which interventions are most effective with different groups of students at risk for dropping out remains a challenge.

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2009a), students who leave school without a diploma will earn a quarter of a million fewer dollars during their careers compared to high school graduates. Earnings lost due to reduced wages over their lifetime for dropouts from the class of 2008 are predicted to be more than \$319 billion nationally. In addition, dropouts contribute fewer dollars to the local, state, and federal tax base and rely on public assistance and social services to a larger degree than those who graduate.

High school graduates report greater life satisfaction than do those who drop out of school, live an average of a decade longer, and engage in civic responsibilities such

as voting and volunteering at higher rates than do dropouts (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009b). High school graduates use food stamps, public assistance, and government health care at lower rates than do dropouts. In addition, children of parents who earn diplomas are healthier and are more likely to graduate from high school than are children of dropouts. If schools are not able to significantly reduce dropout rates in the near future, as many as 13 million students are predicted to drop out in the next decade, reducing national revenue by as much as \$3 trillion (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009b).

Characteristics of Dropouts

Early research focused on the characteristics of individual students who dropped out of school, including a number of demographic and social factors such as socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, gender, and disability status. Living in poverty at the elementary, middle, and/or high school levels is one of several factors significantly correlated to dropping out of school (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007). Young adults aged 16 to 24 from the highest socioeconomic backgrounds are seven times more likely to have graduated than those from the lowest socioeconomic quartile. Although demographic characteristics linked with dropping out may not be altered by school efforts, these indicators can be used to identify groups of students who might be at risk for dropping out and who might benefit from services targeted to increase graduation rates (Hammond et al., 2007).

While early studies focused on individual characteristics and conditions that might be used to predict which students would drop out of school (Shannon & Blysm, 2003), research has expanded to investigate additional home, community, and school-

based factors that frequently influence graduation rates, many of which can be influenced by intervention efforts. Low academic achievement, being retained or over-age, and poor attendance are significantly linked to dropping out across elementary, middle, and high school levels (Hammond et al., 2007). These factors are readily identifiable and may be targeted by dropout prevention efforts.

Students' experiences in school impact whether they will graduate from high school, and academic performance and engagement in school are major indicators of potential dropouts (Hammond et al., 2007). Poor academic performance as measured by low grades, failing courses, or low test scores, is one predictor of dropping out. A number of studies have also found the combination of failing core academic classes, poor attendance, and earning poor behavioral marks from teachers linked to later dropping out of school (Balfanz, Herzog, & Maclver, 2007; Neild & Balfanz, 2006).

Students may also psychologically disengage from school, not expect to graduate, and lack academic plans beyond high school. In addition, disruptive classroom behaviors can indicate student disengagement. These behaviors which interrupt instruction and student learning may include impulsive actions, defying authority, arguing with peers, and/or failing to comply with school rules (Bidell & Deacon, 2010; Powell & Newgent, 2008). Students who exhibit disruptive classroom behaviors experience both academic and psychosocial difficulties and may strain limited school resources and services (Bidell & Deacon, 2010). Such inappropriate behaviors are occurring in school classrooms with increasing frequency, resulting in increased disciplinary referrals and lowered academic achievement (Lambert, Cartledge, & Heward, 2006). In addition, disruptive classroom behaviors have been linked with

dropping out and delinquency, particularly when such activities begin in primary grades (Vitaro, Brendgen, Larosse, & Trembaly, 2005).

Disciplinary infractions in elementary, middle, and high school have also been linked to dropping out, as have antisocial behaviors including getting in trouble with the police, acts of violence, and substance abuse (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986). Even after controlling for student demographic characteristics and academic achievement, Rumberger (2004) found that a lack of student engagement in school is significantly linked to dropping out.

Owings and Kaplan (2001) cite a number of studies linking retention for one or more grade levels to later dropping out of school. Research findings indicate that retention does not have a positive effect on student achievement and retained students are significantly more likely to experience discipline problems and to drop out of school (Owings & Kaplan, 2001). Alexander, Entwistle and Horsey (1997) report that 63% of middle school students and 64% of elementary school students who were retained failed to later earn a high school diploma.

Trends in Predicting Dropouts

Attempting to identify and track the more than 40 different risk factors linked to dropping out can be a daunting and confusing challenge. Trends reported in meta-analyses of dropout research help make sense of this complex issue. Analyzing multiple factors rather than attempting to track only one or two characteristics is an important recommendation and schools should not focus solely on student characteristics. Rather, include community, family, and school-related factors when attempting to determine who might be most at risk for school failure.

Dropping Out is a Process, Not a Single Event

Dropping out can be described as process, rather than a single event, and is often the end result of a long period of disengagement (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Hammond et al., 2007; Jimerson, Egeland, Stroufe, & Carlson, 2000). Academic challenges, grade retention, disengagement from school, and problems with behaviors and attendance frequently begin in elementary school, compound over time, and are linked with dropping out in later years. Dropouts reported they frequently missed class and felt alienated from school for one or more years prior to leaving school, providing further support for a long process of progressive disengagement (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006).

Analyze Multiple Factors

Although a number of factors significantly relate to dropping out, there is no single reliable factor that accurately predicts who will drop out. In addition, because many students who earn high school diplomas share similar characteristics to those who fail to graduate, potential dropouts are difficult to identify. School personnel should monitor several risk factors across family, community, and school domains to increase the likelihood of identifying students most at risk for dropping out, rather than relying solely on individual student characteristics (Bohanon, Flannery, Mallory, & Fenning, 2009). Because all dropouts are not alike, it is important to use different combinations of risk factors to identify different subgroups of potential dropouts (Hammond et al., 2007). There is a general consensus that students with greater numbers of risk factors are more likely to drop out than students who have fewer risk factors (Ingels, Curtin, Kaufman, Alt, & Wells, 2002). For example, Gleason and Dynarski (2002) found that

about 25% of students with 2 risk factors dropped out and about 33% of students with 3 risk factors failed to graduate. Even when using a regression model of 40 risk factors to identify students at greatest risk of dropping out, 60% of these students successfully graduated (Gleason & Dynarski).

Identify Subgroups of Dropouts

Several different subgroups of dropouts have been described in the literature, each identified with different constellations of risk factors. For example, some students may be identified early in elementary school and show characteristics most frequently linked to dropping out. In addition to low grades and test scores, these students have poor attendance and frequent behavioral problems (Barrington & Hendricks, 1989). Many of these students come from limited socioeconomic backgrounds and may be described as "traditional" dropouts (Hammond et al., 2007).

Another group of students drop out for reasons other than academic failure. These "able" dropouts have average test scores and grades, but may leave school due to disciplinary issues, behavioral problems, or conflicts with school policies. Others may withdraw due to factors from outside the school, such as getting pregnant or married, gaining employment, or because of social pressure (Hammond et al., 2007).

Barrington and Hendricks (1989) describe "non-graduates" as students who remain in high school for four or even five years but never graduate. In elementary school these students are academically successful and attend school regularly. Their differences tend to emerge in middle school where they first experience academic failure, low grades, poor attendance, and disciplinary problems.

Schools and school divisions may need to track a number of factors over time in order to best determine various groups of students who might be at risk of dropping out. Because different groups of students dropout for various reasons, a variety of interventions should be designed and implemented to address identified student behaviors and needs.

Identify Push-Out Versus Pull-Out Factors

Another way to conceptualize the complex factors that influence a student's decision to drop out of school is to identify push-out and pull-out factors. Pull-out factors are experiences outside of school that influence a student's decision to drop out and may include community, family and peer influences, in addition to student characteristics. Some students face increasing family responsibilities, demands to work, get pregnant, or get married and decide to leave school (Ross Epp & Epp, 2001).

Push-out factors are those factors from within the school that encourage some students to leave school, such as policies and procedures, school structure, school climate, and environmental issues that alienate students. For example, some school personnel may find it more practical and/or convenient to remove challenging students from school even if they are still officially enrolled (Ross Epp & Epp, 2001). These students are commonly considered dropouts, but critics suggest that many of them are pushed out of school because of inflexible administrative and school policies. The majority of students who leave school before graduation do not disappear unexpectedly (Ross Epp & Epp, 2001). Students are aware of the push-out process and more frequently cite push-out factors such as not liking school, failing academically, excessive

absenteeism, or having difficult relationships with teachers as their primary reasons for leaving school (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Ekstrom et al., 1986).

One group of students that frequently experience push-out factors and may be more likely to drop out of school are students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or who are questioning their sexual orientation (LGBTQ). Frequently these students are targets of bullying and hazing in schools, with almost 90% reporting being harassed in the past year (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010). Many LGBTQ students feel unsafe at school, and are more than three times as likely as other students to have missed class or an entire day of school because of feeling unsafe or uncomfortable (Kosciw et al., 2010). LGBTQ students are at risk of truancy and dropping out of school and are more frequently socially isolated, depressed, and suicidal (D'Augelli, 2002) A smaller proportion of LGBTQ students plan to complete high school or attend college compared to their peers (Education Longitudinal Study, 2005).

Although fewer than half of LGBTQ students reported that their school had a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), those that did experienced a more positive school climate, less harassment, and greater faculty support compared to LGBTQ peers in schools that did not have a GSA (Kosciw et al., 2010). School counselors can be helpful advocates in establishing or sponsoring GSA organizations and can also support LGBTQ students individually and in support groups (Curry & Hayes, 2009; DePaul, Walsh, & Dam, 2009). Encouraging professional development about LGBTQ issues for faculty and advocating for school policies that include sexual orientation are other ways professional school counselors can support LGBTQ students (Curry & Hayes, 2009; DePaul et al., 2009).

Dropout Prevention Recommendations

There are a number of recommendations to reduce dropout rates and promote graduation suggested in the research (see appendix). Interventions include school-wide reform strategies to enhance student engagement, targeted assistance to identified individuals or groups of students at risk for dropping out, providing support for students during transitions, and using diagnostic tracking systems to identify student and school factors that impact dropout rates (Dynarski et al., 2008). Several of the most common strategies from promising dropout prevention programs are reviewed.

Implement Tracking Systems

Although there is currently only limited empirical support for developing longitudinal tracking systems, experts recommend that states, schools, and school districts develop and maintain local data systems to assist in identifying potential dropouts (Dynarski et al., 2008; Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). While it is not possible to predict with any degree of accuracy whether a particular student will drop out, there are some patterns that may be identified when schools and divisions track a number of indicators over time. Because dropout rates are impacted by community, geographic and demographic factors, it is important to collect local data to better predict who will dropout. Initially each school or division should track a relatively large number of factors in order to determine the best indicators for dropping out in their community (Hammond et al., 2007).

Tracking systems should use unique student identifiers to allow for comprehensive longitudinal tracking of individual students. Systems should minimally include a history of student absences, grade retention, low levels of academic

achievement, and disengagement from school as early as fourth grade, as these factors have been significantly linked with an increased risk of dropping out (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). Tracking systems may also be used to monitor students' social engagement and academic performance and may use automated alerts to identify students who might be experiencing behavioral problems or life challenges requiring interventions to remain on track for graduation (Dynarski et al., 2008).

The frequency and type of disruptive classroom behaviors should also be tracked over time as a way to identify students who may potentially experience school failure. Students exhibiting disruptive classroom behaviors frequently are removed from their class or school for disciplinary referrals resulting in detention, suspension, or expulsion (Bidell & Deacon, 2010). These students are more likely to fail academically and are greater risk for delinquency, substance abuse, and dropping out (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Other factors to monitor include prior withdrawals from school, socioeconomic status, and other locally determined characteristics that have been linked to dropping out.

In order for tracking systems to be effective, data must be up-to-date and easily accessible to school personnel who will monitor and then intervene appropriately. Although information on many of the selected indicators may already be collected by schools, an additional challenge may be identifying the additional financial and personnel resources required to create a centralized tracking system.

Train and Use Advocates

Moderate empirical support exists for programs that use trained advocates to work with targeted students in middle and high school settings (Dynarski et al., 2008).

Adult advocates do much more than mentor at-risk students and are expected to provide substantial support such as aligning services to address academic and social concerns, advocating for the student, communicating with parents and school personnel, and meeting frequently with the student. Having sustained and meaningful relationships with caring adults is one way to promote student engagement in school and effective mentoring has reduced risky behaviors and absenteeism while promoting communication, social, and academic skills (Dynarski et al., 2008). These positive results are found in programs where adults are trained and work intensively as case managers meeting daily with selected at-risk youth. Challenges may include difficulties in locating enough school and community resources to match identified students with an appropriate mentor, finding time for advocates to work with faculty and students, and providing adequate supervision and support for advocates.

Provide Academic Support and Enrichment

Using effective strategies to enhance academic success and engage students is another recommendation to reduce drop out rates (Dynarski et al., 2008). Suggested interventions focused on enhancing student achievement may be offered through tutoring; homework assistance programs; or more intense academic support either as a part of the regular school day, after school, during the summer, or on weekends. These strategies may improve student engagement, increase academic skill development, and enhance learning (Dynarski et al., 2008). More successful programs offered additional core classes for struggling students, remediated reading, provided opportunities for credit recovery, or provided tutoring several days a week. Some schools may have to consider innovative scheduling in order to provide academic support and enrichment in

conjunction with regular instruction. Other programs may need to develop additional funding or agency involvement to support tutorial programs and remediation services.

Promote Social Skill Development

Assisting students in developing social skills, such as effective communication and problem-solving skills; identifying, understanding, and regulating emotions; goal-setting; and conflict resolution is also recommended (Dynarski et al., 2008). Research supports a connection between disruptive classroom behaviors and dropping out (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Developing appropriate behaviors through social skills education can enhance students' sense of affiliation and identification with school; and maintaining student engagement has also been linked to persistence in school (Rumberger, 2004). Students who are involved in social skills training learn to effectively manage personal, family, and social issues; form more positive relationships with teachers and peers; and are more involved in school activities (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). Teachers, however, may be uncomfortable with teaching social skills and may be reluctant to give up instructional time for school counselors to promote psychosocial development.

Address Transition to Freshman Year

Students frequently make transitions as they move to the next grade, return to school after an illness or suspension, or relocate. Because freshmen in high school frequently demonstrate a decline in academic achievement and attendance it is important to assist students with successfully negotiating the transition to high school. "The ninth grade year is often considered a critical make-it or break-it year when students get on- or off-track to succeed in high school" (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007, p. 5).

Students fail the ninth grade at higher rates than any other high school grade and a disproportionate number of students who later drop out are retained in ninth grade. Neild and Balfanz (2006) noted that about two-thirds of the Philadelphia students who dropped out were classified as ninth-graders, based on accrued credits towards graduation, despite being enrolled in high school for several years. Ninth-grade enrollments experience a bulge, as many students enter high school poorly prepared for increased academic demands and fail to be promoted to sophomore standing. In cities with the highest dropout rates, Balfanz and Ledger (2006) found that up to 40% of freshmen must repeat their freshmen year, and that fewer than 15% of these students go on to graduate from high school. Allensworth and Easton (2005) reported that academic success in ninth grade is a better predictor of successful graduation than demographic factors or academic achievement in earlier grades.

Implement School-Wide Interventions

In addition to implementing diagnostic tracking systems to identify students with risk factors associated with dropping out, and providing targeted academic, social, and transitional support for identified students, interventions implemented at the school level may impact student success and reduce dropout rates. School-wide efforts should focus on learning, creating appropriate and high expectations for all students, and monitoring progress at all levels (Sweet, 2004). Creating a cohesive, student-centered learning environment, a culture of support and caring relationships, and strong connections to post-secondary learning and career opportunities are other recommendations. Developing a positive school climate and supportive environment are important school attributes (Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999). Students are less likely to drop out of high

schools where relationships between teachers and students are consistently positive, so effective interpersonal skills and establishing strong connections between staff and students are essential. Developing positive teacher-student relationships depends upon an effective school structure and organization as well (Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999). In addition, it is important to develop and offer interventions that are designed to meet the needs identified within each school as not all strategies will be appropriate for every school.

Dropout Prevention Implications for School Counselors

ASCA emphasizes that school counselors support all students in their career, psychosocial, and academic development (ASCA, 2005). ASCA has woven four themes into the National Model framework: (a) leadership, (b) advocacy, (c) collaboration and teaming, and (d) systemic change. If utilized effectively, these areas of counselor expertise can complement other school, community, agency, and family efforts to address dropout rates. The ASCA National Model school counselor roles of collaboration, coordination, and consultation also align well with coordinating services and programs to reduce dropout rates and promote academic achievement in all students. Finally, the importance of using data to demonstrate impact of specific interventions on individual students meshes well with recommendations for dropout prevention efforts.

Leadership and Collaboration

School counselors are expected to serve as leaders in schools and to collaborate with educational colleagues as well as with community members, other agencies, and with parents and families of school-aged children (ASCA, 2005). Efforts in dropout

prevention should include counselors and schools forming partnerships with local agencies to more effectively support students (Dynarski et al., 2008). Such efforts might include family counseling or parent education workshops; community programs offered after school, on weekends, or during the summer; and coordinated efforts to provide mentors, role models, or advocates (Hammond et al., 2007). School counselors, with their training in effective communication and collaboration can play important roles in developing and coordinating responsive programs to address student needs.

Leadership initiatives for school counselors might include serving on dropout prevention task forces to address individual, school, or community factors that have been linked with dropping out. School counselors can plan and lead parent training sessions or educate local school board members and other stakeholders regarding effective dropout prevention practices or about student concerns gathered from implementing a school-wide needs assessment. In addition, counselors might offer professional development activities for teachers and other staff regarding risk factors for dropping out; promising strategies; and effective ways of developing positive classroom and school environments where students feel welcomed, connected, and nurtured. School counselors can take the initiative to ensure administrators and teachers recognize the school's roles of providing appropriate academic challenges and fostering a sense of belonging for each student.

School counselors may also play a leadership role in school-wide efforts to address disruptive classroom behaviors through modeling appropriate pro-social behaviors, assisting teachers with difficult students, and using counseling interventions as an alternative to disciplinary or punitive sanctions for students exhibiting such

behaviors. Because students who are frequently disruptive in school have also been found to have lower self-concepts, school counselors should consider ways in which they can enhance both appropriate behaviors and student self-concepts (Bidell & Deacon, 2010). Collaborative efforts by school counselors, teachers, administrators, and parents may reduce incidents of disruptive classroom behaviors and help keep students positively engaged in school (Bidell & Deacon, 2010).

In addition to providing counseling and preventative measures to reduce disruptive classroom behaviors, school counselors should collaborate with administrators regarding conduct policies and procedures. Day-Vines and Terriquez (2008) found that addressing inequities and clarifying disciplinary procedures, when coupled with a strength-based approach to students, resulted in a 75% decrease in suspensions from school. These and similar opportunities for leadership, collaboration, and consultation align well with roles recommended in the ASCA National Model.

Advocacy and Systemic Change

The counseling role of advocacy is also important to dropout prevention efforts in a number of arenas. In addition to working with students to establish individual academic and career plans, counselors should advocate at the school administrative level for supportive programs for at-risk youth (Svec, 1987). At the district level, counselors should work for systemic change to reduce push-out factors such as zero tolerance attendance and disciplinary policies. Efforts in advocacy and systemic change might include school counseling efforts to implement a school-wide bullying prevention program to improve school climate, establishing a policy of providing counseling and support rather than immediate expulsion for students found with drugs, or meeting with

teachers to discuss options other than failure for students with academic difficulties. Advocating for afterschool, weekend, or summer programs provide additional opportunities to help students enhance academic skills, increase their engagement, or make up required courses and are important options for struggling students (Dynarski et al., 2008).

Delivery System

School counselors should incorporate dropout prevention activities in their on-going guidance curriculum. Classroom guidance sessions should be presented to all students to aid in adjustment to school, clarify graduation requirements and academic expectations, or provide career information that promotes understanding of the connection between school and work (Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007). Small group sessions may be offered to targeted students to address concerns with attendance or behavioral issues, promote positive self-esteem, or to develop effective skills in communication or conflict mediation (Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007). Offering small group or individual interventions focused on study skills, specific academic development, and test-taking strategies for students who are struggling academically is also important. In addition, counselors may form partnerships with community organizations, parent groups, local universities or businesses, or use faculty to meet needs for tutors. Offering programs to support successful academic and social transition from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school can benefit all students, while on-going support groups might be established for new students to the school division or those who move mid-year (Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007).

Developing mentoring, tutoring support, or teacher advisory programs are other opportunities for school counselors to develop effective counseling programs while addressing student needs (White & Kelly, 2010). Such programs can provide positive social and academic support for all students with more specialized services for targeted students at-risk for dropping out (White & Kelly, 2010). Adult advocates may be trained to assist students in setting realistic and attainable academic and social/behavioral goals. Appropriate problem-solving and life skills instruction can be incorporated into existing curricula, offered to small groups of students, or implemented through teacher advisory programs or mentoring programs (Dynarski et al., 2008).

Individual student planning may also be used to establish appropriately challenging academic programs for students and to match student interests with appropriate curricula or electives. In addition, responsive services may help individual or small groups of students remain in school when faced with crises such as alcohol or substance abuse, mental health issues, pregnancy, or homelessness. Because poor attendance is strongly linked to academic failure and to later dropping out, carefully monitoring and quickly intervening with students who are frequently absent is another recommendation (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007).

Limitations and Future Directions

Dealing with potential dropouts is challenging for teachers, administrators, and counselors, so it is important to build consensus and support before implementing strategies to address struggling students' academic, social, or emotional deficiencies. (Cholewa, Smith-Adcock, & Amatea, 2010). Teachers may be reluctant to use class time to promote social skill development while administrators are faced with difficult

decisions regarding which prevention programs to fund. Faced with budget limitations, it becomes even more important to carefully match prevention services with students who will most benefit from various dropout prevention programs in order to be cost-effective. Also, despite increased understanding of the importance of early interventions at the elementary school level for students at risk for later dropping out of school, much of the current research focuses on strategies at the secondary levels, when students actually leave school. It is important, however, to identify students and implement strategies as early as possible because it often requires intensive effort to reverse years of academic failure or disengagement when interventions don't begin until students are in high school.

Although many dropout prevention efforts focus on either targeted interventions with individual students or more comprehensive school-wide reforms, research indicates that it is important to combine effective strategies from both approaches (Maclver & Maclver, 2009). "Comprehensive reforms focused on school practices needs to address the problems of absenteeism, behavioral problems, and course failure for the majority of students, while additional, individually focused efforts will be necessary for students with more intensive needs" (Maclver & Maclver, 2009, p. 10). These practices mesh well with school counseling efforts to provide services at the individual, small group, and school-wide level. In addition, monitoring, evaluating, and modifying dropout prevention strategies compliment the need for school counselors to use data to demonstrate the effectiveness of their services and may ultimately result in decreasing the number of school dropouts.

References

- Alliance for Excellent Education (2009a). *High school dropouts in America*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/fact_sheets/high_school_dropouts_america
- Alliance for Excellent Education (2009b). *The high cost of high school dropouts: What the nation pays for inadequate high schools*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.all4ed.org/files/HighCost.pdf>
- American School Counselor Association. (2005). *The ASCA National Model: A framework for school counseling programs*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- American School Counselor Association. (2009). *The role of the school counselor*. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=341>
- Alexander, K. L., Entwistle, D. R., & Horsey, C. (1997). From first grade forward: Early foundations of high school dropout. *Sociology of Education*, 70, 87-107. Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/2673158.
- Allensworth, E., & Easton, J. Q. (2005). *The on-track indicator as a predictor of high school graduation*. Chicago, IL. Retrieved from the Consortium on Chicago Schools Research website at <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/p78.pdf>.
- Balfanz, R., Herzog, L., & Maclver, D. (2007). Preventing student disengagement and keeping students on the graduation path in urban middle schools: Early identification and effective interventions. *Educational Psychologist*, 42(4), 223-235. doi:10.1080/00461520701621079
- Balfanz, R., & Ledger, N. (2006). Closing dropout factories: The graduation rate crisis we know and what can be done about it. *Education Week*, 25, 42-43.

- Barrington, B. L., & Hendricks, B. (1989). Differentiating characteristics of high school graduates, dropouts, and non-graduates. *Journal of Educational Research, 82*, 309-319. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40539658>
- Bidell, M. P., & Deacon, R. E. (2010). School counselors connecting the dots between disruptive classroom behavior and youth self-concept. *Journal of School Counseling, 8*(9). Retrieved from <http://jsc.montana.edu/articles/v8n9.pdf>
- Bohanon, H., Flannery, K. B., Mallory, J., & Fenning, P. (2009). Utilizing positive behavior supports in high school settings to improve school completion rates for students with high incidence conditions. *Exceptionality, 17*, 30-44. doi:10.1080/09362830802590193
- Bridgeland, J. M., Dilulio, J. J., & Morison, K. B. (2006). *The silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts*. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises, LLC, in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Retrieved from <http://www.temescalassociates.com/documents/resources/transition/The%20Silent%20Epidemic%20Perspectives%20of%20High%20School%20Dropouts.pdf>
- Cholewa, B., Smith-Adcock, S., & Amatea, E. (2010). Decreasing elementary school children's disruptive behaviors: A review of four evidenced-based programs for school counselors. *Journal of School Counseling, 8*(4). Retrieved from <http://jsc.montana.edu/articles/v8n4.pdf>
- Curry, J. R., & Hayes, B. G. (2009). Bolstering school based support by comprehensively addressing the needs of an invisible minority: Implications for

- professional school counselors. *Journal of School Counseling*, 7(7). Retrieved from <http://jsc.montana.edu/articles/v7n7.pdf>
- D' Augelli, A. R., & Hershberge, S. L. (1993). Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth in community settings: Personal challenges and mental health problems. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 21, 421-448.
- Day-Vines, N. L., & Terriquez, V. (2008). A strengths-based approach to promoting prosocial behavior among African American and Latino students. *Professional School Counseling*, 12(2), 170-175.
- DePaul, J., Walsh, M. E., & Dam, U. C. (2009). The role of school counselors in addressing sexual orientation. *Professional School Counseling*, 12(4), 300-308.
- Dynarski, M., Clarke, L., Cobb, B., Finn, J., Rumberger, R., & Smink, J. (2008). *Dropout prevention: A practice guide* (NCEE 2008-4025). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. doi:10.1207/S1532771XJLE0103_2
- Education Trust (1999). *National center for transforming school counseling*. Retrieved from <http://www.edtrust.org/dc/tsc>
- Education Longitudinal Study (2005). 2002/04 data files and electronic codebook system (first followup [ECBICD-ROM public use]). Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/>
- Ekstrom, R. B., Goertz, M. E., Pollack, J. M., & Rock, D. A. (1986). Who drops out of high school and why? Findings from a national study. *Teachers College Record*, 87(3), 356-373.

- Gleason, P., & Dynarski, M. (2002). Do we know whom to serve? Issues in using risk factors to identify dropouts. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 7(1), 25-41.
- Goldschmidt, P., & Wang, J. (1999). When can schools affect dropout behavior? A longitudinal multilevel analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 36, 715-738. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1163518>
- Hammond, C., Linton, D., Smink, J., & Drew, S. (2007). *Dropout risk factors and exemplary programs*. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center, Communities in Schools. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED497057.pdf>
- Ingels, S. J., Curtin, T. R., Kaufman, P., Alt, M. N., & Wells, E. (2002). *Coming of age in the 1990s: The eighth grade class of 1988 12 years later*. (NCES 2002-321). Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics, U. S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/2002609.pdf#page=7>
- Jimerson, S., Egeland, B., Sroufe, L. A., & Carlson, B. (2000). A prospective longitudinal study of high school dropouts examining multiple predictors across development. *Journal of School Psychology*, 38(1), 525-549. doi:10.1016/S0022-4405(00)00051-0
- Kennelly, L., & Monrad, M. (2007). *Approaches to dropout prevention: Heeding early warning signs with appropriate interventions*. National High School Center, American Institutes for Research, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://betterhighschools.org>
- Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Diaz, E. M., and Bartkiewicz, M. J. (2010). *The 2009 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and*

- transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN. Retrieved from http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN_ATTACHMENTS/file/000/001/1675-2.pdf
- Lambert, M. C., Cartledge, G., & Heward, W. L. (2006). Effects of response cards on disruptive behavior and academic responding during math lessons by fourth-grade urban students. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 8, 88-99. doi:10.1177/10983007060080020701
- Maclver, M. A., & Maclver, D. J. (2009). *Beyond the indicators: An integrated school-level approach to dropout prevention*. Arlington, VA: The Mid-Atlantic Equity Center, The George Washington University Center for Equity and Excellence in Education.
- Marsh, H., & Kleitman, S. (2002). Extracurricular school activities: The good, the bad, and the non-linear. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72, 464-513. Retrieved from <http://her.hepg.org/content/051388703v7v7736/fulltext.pdf>
- National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform. A report to the nation and to the Secretary of Education*. Retrieved from <http://mathcurriculumcenter.org/PDFS/CCM/summaries/NationAtRisk.pdf>
- National Goals 2000: Reforming education to improve student achievement* (1998). U.S. Department of Education: Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/G2KReforming/g2ch1.html>
- Neild, R. C., & Balfanz, R. (2006). *Unfulfilled promise: The dimensions and characteristics of Philadelphia's dropout crisis, 2000-2005*. Baltimore: Center for

- Social Organization of Schools, John Hopkins University. Retrieved from http://iliveunitedphilly.org/publications/documents/Unfulfilled_Promise_Project_U-turn.pdf
- No Child Left Behind Act.* (2001). U.S. Department of Education: Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml?src=ln>
- Owings, W. A., Kaplan, L. S. (2001). Standards, retention and social promotion. *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin*, 85, 57-66. doi:10.1177/019263650108562906
- Powell, M. L., & Newgent, R. A. (2008). Disc golf play: Using recreation to improve disruptive classroom behaviors. *Journal of School Counseling*, 6(2). Retrieved from <http://www.jsc.montana.edu/articles/v6n2.pdf>.
- Ross Epp, J., & Epp, W. (2001). Easy exit: School policies and student attrition. *Journal of Education For Students Placed At Risk*, 6(3), 231-247. doi:10.1207/S15327671ESPR0603_5
- Rumberger, R. W. (2004). Why students dropout of school. In Orfield, G. (Ed.), *Dropouts in America: Confronting the graduation rate crisis* (pp. 131-156). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press. Retrieved from <http://www.lmri.ucsb.edu/dropouts>
- Rumberger, R. W., & Palardy, G. C. (2005). Test scores, dropout rates, and transfer rates as alternative indicators of high school performance. *American Educational Research Journal*, 41, 3-42. doi:10.3102/00028312042001003
- Shannon, G. S., & Bylsma, P. (2003). *Helping students finish school: Why students dropout and how to help them graduate*. Office of the Superintendent of Public

Instruction, Olympia, WA. Retrieved from <http://www.k12.wa.us/research/default.aspx>

Stillwell, R. (2010). *Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2007–08* (NCES 2010-341). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2010341>

Suh, S., Suh, J., & Houston, I. (2007). Predictors of categorical at-risk high school dropouts. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 85*, 196-203.

Svec, H. (1987). Youth advocacy and high school dropout. *The High School Journal, 70*, 185-192. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40364977>

Sweet, J. R. (2004). *Case studies of high-performing, high-technology schools: Final research report on schools with predominantly low-income, African-American, or Latino student populations*. North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. Naperville, IL: Learning Point Associates. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED489508.pdf>

Vitaro, F., Brendgen, M., Larosse, S., & Trembaly, R. E. (2005). Kindergarten disruptive behaviors, protective factors, and educational achievement by early adulthood. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 97*(4), 617-629. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.97.4.617

Wehlage, G. G., & Rutter, R. A. (1986). Dropping out: How much do schools contribute to the problem? *Teachers College Record, 87*(3), 374-392. Retrieved from <http://www.tcrecord.org> ID Number: 660

White, S., & Kelly, D. (2010). The school counselor's role in school dropout prevention.

Journal of Counseling and Development, 88, 227-235.

Wright, R. J. (2012). *Introduction to school counseling*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Publications, Inc.

Appendix

Dropout Prevention Interventions and Strategies

Intervention	Strategy
Academic Interventions	Tutoring, academic support, afterschool programming, service learning, accelerated credit accumulation, extra classes
Psychosocial Support	Behavioral interventions, structured extracurricular activities, life skills development, counseling, anger management, conflict resolution, addressing transitions
Family Interventions	Engaging, strengthening and/or counseling with families
Targeting High Risk Behaviors	Probation, monitoring truancy and attendance, pregnancy, teen parenting, substance abuse prevention/intervention
Adult Support	Mentoring, case management, court advocates, service coordination
School Structure and Programming	School environment, classroom climate, school reorganization, freshmen academies, professional development, systemic/policy renewal
School Curriculum	Differentiated teaching, student-focused instruction, interactive instruction, culturally or linguistically relevant instruction, high academic standards and rigorous curriculum for all students, link to career development, job training, workforce readiness

Source: Summarized from *Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs* by C. Hammond, D. Linton, J. Smink, J., and S. Drew, 2007, National Dropout Prevention Center/Network and Communities in Schools, Clemson, SC.; *Fifteen Effective Strategies for Improving Student Attendance and Truancy Prevention* by J. Smink and M. Reimer, 2005, National Dropout Prevention Center/Network; and "The School Counselor's Role in School Dropout Prevention" by S. White and D. Kelly, 2010, *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 88,p. 227-235.

Biographical Statements

Donna J. Dockery, Ph.D., NCC, NCSC is an assistant professor in the Department of Counselor Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. Her academic interests include school counseling, gifted education, service learning, and multicultural counseling.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Donna J. Dockery, Department of Counselor Education, PO Box 842020, Richmond, VA 23284-2020. E-mail: djdockery@vcu.edu