THE IMPORTANCE OF MIDDLE SCHOOL IN HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

➢ In the 2010-11 school year, over 1,500 7th and 8th grade students dropped out of public school in Texas.

➢ The percentage of 7th and 8th grade African-American students dropping out was three times higher than the rates for White student in the same grades.

➢ The percentage of 7th and 8th grade Hispanic students was two times higher than White students in the same grade.

Research suggests that as early as the sixth grade, with the transition from elementary school to middle school, students begin to disengage from school.

➢ Students experience a disruption in routine as they move away from a structured elementary school setting to a new school with different teachers and students, larger class sizes, more challenging academic instruction and complex testing.

➢ Middle and high school students face greater temptation from their peers to participate in activities that take them away from school and hurt their attendance.

➢ Middle school youth living in high-poverty neighborhoods with fewer school and community resources face additional challenges that contribute to disengagement. They often attend chaotic schools with high levels of teacher turnover and teacher vacancies. Bullying and fighting may be more common.

EARLY WARNING INDICATORS – THE ABCs

A student's decision to drop out is a slow process of disengagement. Students often send distress signals well before leaving school.

A decade of research has identified Attendance, Behavior and Course performance - the "ABCs of Disengagement" – as predictive early warning indicators of students likely to fall off the path to graduation:

➢ Attendance – Absenteeism of 20 days or more; missing 10% of school days
➢ Behavior – Two or more mild or serious behavior violations
➢ Course Passing/Performance – a GPA less than 2.0, failing English or Math in middle school, two or more failures in ninth-grade coursework or failing to pass to the 10th grade on-time

Students who develop off-track indicators often do so as early as the sixth grade. The earlier a middle student develops one of these flags, the lower the odds of graduating.

Early identification coupled with immediate and effective intervention is critical to keeping middle school youth on track, in particular, students attending low-performing schools located in high poverty areas. Absent intervention, these students are not likely to graduate.

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME (OST) PROGRAMS

While intervention is key, schools alone are often incapable of providing the additional support that middle school students need to stay on track.

OST programs provide students with supervised activities that encourage learning and development outside of the traditional school day in a safe, supervised setting while parents are at work.

OST programs keep middle school youth safe, help them navigate the transition to middle school, encourage student engagement in education at a time when students often begin to disengage and enable students to interact with positive adult role models.

NONPROFIT AGENCIES OFFERING OST PROGRAMS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

Girl Scouts of Southwest Texas – http://www.girlscouts-swtx.org

Martinez Street Women's Center – http://www.mswomenscenter.org

SAN ANTONIO AREA FOUNDATION HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION INITIATIVE

The San Antonio Area Foundation is committed to increasing the high school graduation rate in Bexar County. Our High School Completion initiative awards grants to nonprofit organizations providing OST programs for Bexar County students in the 6th through 9th grades that:

➢ Address and improve at least one of the three dropout indicators – attendance, behavior or course grades
➢ Enable students to hold leadership roles or that engage families in participation
➢ Have a relationship with a public school

In addition to funding OST programs for middle school students, the Area Foundation builds the capacity of OST programs through training and technical assistance, convenes stakeholders, engages donors and commissions research to strengthen our grantmaking.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Afterschool Alliance - http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/

Alliance for Excellent Education – http://www.all4ed.org/

Excel Beyond the Bell SA – http://beyondthebellsa.org/

Everyone Graduates Center - http://new.every1graduates.org/

Harvard Family Research Project – http://www.hfrp.org/

National Institute for Out-of-School Time (NIOST) - http://www.niost.org/

Texas Afterschool Association - www.txafterschool.org

Texas Partnership for Out of School Time (TXPOST) - http://www.txpost.org/

The Wallace Foundation - http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/after-school/Pages/default.aspx

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