

**MOBILIZATION  
PLAN BLUEPRINT  
FOR INCREASING  
HIGH SCHOOL  
GRADUATION RATES**



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# MOBILIZATION PLAN BLUEPRINT FOR INCREASING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

## NPC Mobilization Plan Task Force on Increasing High School Graduation Rates

High school graduation is a major milestone on a youth's path to successful adulthood. Over their lifetime, high school graduates earn 74 percent more than those who drop out.<sup>1</sup> High school graduation is the single most powerful predictor of whether a young person coming from generations of poverty will break the cycle.

Despite the importance of a high school diploma, more than 26 percent of the country's youth do not graduate on time. A disproportionate number of these youth are poor and/or a member of a minority group. Our failure to help these young people achieve this important key to their future has serious consequences for the youths themselves, their future families, their communities, and the nation. Many individuals and organizations at the national, state and local levels have committed to turning this situation around.

A task force of the National Professional Council of United Way of America developed this tool to help United Ways and community partners address the dropout crisis. This Blueprint serves three functions:

(1) it presents an outline for a community Mobilization Plan to increase high school graduation; (2) it provides national data and trends on the problem that can guide local

fact-finding and be adapted for inclusion in a community plan; (3) it describes essential strategies for increasing graduation rates and research on effective approaches for using the strategies. These high-level strategies focus on:

- Identify students at risk of dropping out and connect them with the resources they need
- Engage students in learning
- Support families to improve academic achievement, and
- Leverage community supports and systems

The strategies and approaches in the Blueprint focus on middle and high school students as well as their parents/caregivers, their schools, and other community systems that can assist in this effort. They are by no means the definitive or exhaustive list of what can work to increase the graduation rate or what is needed to help young people thrive. Children born healthy, starting school ready to succeed, and reading at grade level by fourth grade are critical building blocks for graduating from high school on time but fall outside the scope of this resource.

Further, while research supports the effectiveness of the approaches outlined in this document, they are not the solution for every young person or every community. Thoughtful, inclusive, and collaborative local deliberation is essential to ensure that the community's mobilization plan for increasing high school graduation is indeed the community's plan. Planning tools help community partnerships understand the national information in the Blueprint, conduct investigations into the issue locally, make local choices about how to intervene in the problem, and assemble their own plan for curbing dropouts and increasing graduation rates.

The following chart shows how your partnership can use the Mobilization Plan Blueprint to craft its own Mobilization Plan.

### Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> Brady, H., Hout, M., and Stiles, J. *Return on Investment: Educational Choices and Demographic Change in California's Future*. Berkeley: University of California, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Forum for Youth Investment. *Ready By 21: Guide to Program Landscape Mapping*. Washington DC: Forum for Youth Investment, 2008.

Sections of Local Mobilization Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What the Blueprint provides</li> <li>• How a community partnership will use it to complete this section of its Plan</li> </ul>
<p><b>I. Problem Statement</b></p> <p>Compelling case for tackling the graduation/dropout issue in this community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blueprint provides template for opening paragraphs and examples of problem statements.</li> <li>• Partnership can tailor and elaborate based on local situation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>II. National Research on the Problem</b></p> <p>Summary of national research on the scope and dimensions of the graduation/dropout issue, focusing on national data that is relevant to the situation in this community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blueprint provides menu of possible content and examples.</li> <li>• Partnership can select and tailor content based on local situation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>III. National Research on Strategies that Work</b></p> <p>Summary of:</p> <p>(1) the high-level strategies needed to address the graduation issue, and</p> <p>(2) research on effective approaches, focusing on approaches selected for local implementation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blueprint provides content on high-level strategies, menu of content on a variety of specific approaches, and examples.</li> <li>• Partnership will use content on high-level strategies and tailor discussion of research on specific approaches selected locally.</li> </ul>
<p><b>IV. The Situation in Our Community</b></p> <p><b>A. Data</b></p> <p>Existing data on the scope and dimensions of the graduation/dropout issue in this community.</p> <p><b>B. Community Resources</b></p> <p>Assessment of existing resources—both:</p> <p>(1) relevant programs and services, and</p> <p>(2) initiatives to address policies, coordination, and other aspects of various systems and organizations.</p> <p><b>C. Findings from Community Engagement</b></p> <p>Summary of learning from engagement with the community about the issue, local resources, and community-based assets that can assist in strategy implementation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blueprint provides examples.</li> <li>• Partnership can fill in local information.</li> </ul>
<p><b>V. Hypothesis and Goal</b></p> <p>The partnership’s theory of change or hypothesis for increasing graduation and the graduation/dropout goal it has established based on local conditions, needs and resources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blueprint provides hypothesis, examples of goals.</li> <li>• Partnership can use hypothesis, fill in local goal.</li> </ul>
<p><b>VI. Local Strategies</b></p> <p>Description of high-level strategies and specific approaches to increasing on-time graduation, selected for local implementation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blueprint provides content on high-level strategies, menu of content on specific approaches, and example.</li> <li>• Partnership can tailor discussion of specific approaches based on approaches selected locally.</li> </ul>
<p><b>VII. Activities and Timeframe</b></p> <p>Major activities/milestones for implementing the Mobilization Plan, and deadlines for reaching each milestone.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blueprint provides example.</li> <li>• Partnership can fill in based on local implementation plan.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Appendices</b></p> <p>Relevant material that is too long to include in the body of the Mobilization Plan or that builds credibility for the Plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blueprint provides examples.</li> <li>• Partnership can insert appendices as appropriate.</li> </ul>

# I. PROBLEM STATEMENT

## What will go in your Mobilization Plan?

This section presents your compelling case for tackling the graduation/dropout issue in your community. It includes:

- A brief (1- to 2-paragraph) description of the broader context for this work (helping children and youth prepare for successful adulthood)
- A summary (1 to 2 pages) of the graduation/drop-out issue locally

## What's here now?

- A sample problem statement

## What's the guidance for creating this section?

You will write your problem statement *after* you have researched the issue locally and selected your strategies for increasing the graduation rate. Your problem statement will be linked to your community situation and selected strategies.

The following section is a starting point.

# Sample Problem Statement

High school graduation is a significant milestone on the path to the American Dream. Yet all too often that dream is cut short for a staggering number of students who fail to graduate from high school.

More than 26 percent of our nation's young adults do not graduate on time.<sup>1</sup> Of the 3.8 million public high school seniors who should graduate in 2009, 1.2 million will not.<sup>2</sup>

One recent study concluded that young adults in the United States are less likely than their parents to earn a diploma—a phenomenon not shared by any other industrialized country in the world.<sup>3</sup>

Missing this milestone can have detrimental effects. A high school graduate will earn on average 74 percent more over a lifetime than a high school dropout.<sup>4</sup> What's more, those who earn a diploma are 15 percent more likely to be employed than their peers who drop out.<sup>5</sup>

There are costs to society, as well. Dropouts are more likely to be in prison—accounting for more than 75 percent of the prison population.<sup>6</sup>

And dropouts are significantly more likely to receive public assistance, and for longer periods of time than those who earn at least a high school diploma.<sup>7</sup>

Dropouts are also more likely to have long-term health issues, have higher mortality rates, higher suicide rates, and higher rates of admission to mental health programs in hospitals.

Our community is struggling with this issue. [For local data on the link between graduation rates in your community and other communities use the *Common Good Forecaster*<sup>TM</sup> at [www.liveunited.org/forecaster](http://www.liveunited.org/forecaster).] Every day that we fail to act we are risking the future of our children and our community as we reach for that American dream.

That's why it's so important that we work together—in new ways—to turn this around. And we need to be bold. We want to [insert local goal here]. It's part of United Way's national goal of cutting the number of dropouts in half over the next decade [optional]. It's an ambitious goal. But if we all work together, we can do it. We *must* do it. The future of our community depends on it.

## Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> UWA calculation using NCES data assuming 73.7% on-time grad rate (no change from 2006). This measure only includes public high school students.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Habash, A. *Counting on Graduation*. Washington, DC: Education Trust, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Brady, H., Hout, M., and Stiles, J. *Return on Investment: Educational Choices and Demographic Change in California's Future*. Berkeley: University of California, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Association of Career and Technical Education. *Issue Brief: Career and Technical Education's Role in Dropout Prevention and Recovery*. Alexandria, VA: ACTE, undated.

<sup>6</sup> Heckman, J.J. and LaFontaine, P.A. *The American High School Graduation Rate: Trends and Levels*. IZA Discussion Paper No. 3216. Bonn, Germany: IZA, 2007; Heckman, J.J., LaFontaine, P.A., Mishel L., and Roy J. "Education Week's graduation rate estimates are 'exceedingly inaccurate,' experts say." Viewpoint. Economic Policy Institute, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> As cited in Child Trends Databank (<http://www.childtrends.databank.org/indicators/highschooldropout.cfm>), Laird, L., Lew, S., Debell, M., and Chapman, C.D. *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2002, 2003*. NCEs 2006-062. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsw2006/2006062.pdf>; Boisjoly, J., Harris, K., and Duncan, G. "Initial Welfare Spells:

Trends, Events, and Duration," *Social Service Review*, 72 (4), 466 – 492, 1998; Moore, K., Gleib, D., Driscoll, A., Zaslow, M., and Redd, Z. "Poverty and Welfare Patterns: Implications for Children," *Journal of Social Policy*. In press.

## II. NATIONAL RESEARCH ON THE PROBLEM

### What will go in your Mobilization Plan?

This is a summary (2 to 3 pages) of national research on the scope and dimensions of the graduation/dropout issue – rates, trends, who’s most affected, why and when they disconnect, system and community contributors to the problem, etc. It focuses on national data that is relevant to the situation in your community.

### What’s here now?

- A summary of the scope of the issue nationally
- An analysis of the benefits of graduating and costs of dropping out
- A discussion of why students drop out, including risk factors and warning signs
- Information about how graduation and dropout rates are calculated

### What’s the guidance for creating this section?

You will not want to include the entire summary of national research from the Blueprint in your local Mobilization Plan because all of it will not be relevant to your community (and it’s too long). To customize what’s currently in the Blueprint to your local situation, we suggest that you wait until your community partnership has selected your approaches for increasing the graduation rate. At this point you can identify those parts of the national research summary that relate to your local findings and decisions, perhaps add other national research that has been useful to your partnership, and create your own 2- to 3-page summary.

The following section is a starting point.

“An estimated 3.8 million youth ages 18 to 24 are neither employed nor in school—15 percent of all young adults. From 2000 to 2004, the ranks of these disconnected young adults grew by 700,000.”

—Annie E. Casey Foundation, cited in American Youth Policy Forum’s *Every Nine Seconds in America a Student Becomes a Dropout*

## A. Scope of the Problem

### 1. The National Perspective

Our country continues to struggle with disturbing trends in the educational experiences of many young adults. Too many children start school behind, continue to fall behind and fail to graduate from high school on time or drop out altogether.

According to federal figures, just 74 percent of students graduate from high school on time.<sup>1</sup> That leaves a quarter of our nation’s students heading down a path that will be detrimental to their future. Of the 26 percent who do not graduate on time,

- 25 percent earn a diploma with additional years of education
- 25 percent earn a GED, and
- 50 percent do not earn any high school credential.<sup>2</sup>

What’s more, this crisis is not showing signs of letting up. On the graduation front, a study by the U.S. Department of Education found that the number of students graduating within four years of beginning high school has been in a slight decline in recent years. Other experts who track graduation statistics show trends of either little or no improvement.

## On-time Graduation Rates by State

State	On-time Graduation for the 2005-06 School Year
Alabama	65.4%
Alaska	62.4%
Arizona	78.0%
Arkansas	74.6%
California	72.3%
Colorado	75.7%
Connecticut	79.3%
Delaware	72.8%
District of Columbia	63.6%
Florida	62.9%
Georgia	60.1%
Hawaii	74.8%
Idaho	78.8%
Illinois	77.8%
Indiana	70.4%
Iowa	87.5%
Kansas	81.5%
Kentucky	77.7%
Louisiana	64.6%
Maine	77.7%
Maryland	78.4%
Massachusetts	77.4%
Michigan	73.3%
Minnesota	85.5%
Mississippi	64.5%
Missouri	80.5%
Montana	82.4%
Nebraska	87.8%
Nevada	53.5%
New Hampshire	80.1%
New Jersey	86.1%
New Mexico	65.5%
New York	67.0%
North Carolina	70.2%
North Dakota	86.3%
Ohio	79.0%
Oklahoma	77.7%
Oregon	73.8%
Pennsylvania	81.8%
Rhode Island	76.0%
South Carolina	58.4%
South Dakota	84.5%
Tennessee	67.7%
Texas	72.2%
Utah	83.8%
Vermont	87.0%
Virginia	78.9%
Washington	74.0%
West Virginia	78.7%
Wisconsin	87.8%
Wyoming	77.3%

Source: United Way of America calculation of averaged freshman graduation rates using National Center for Education Statistics data for fall semester enrollment<sup>3</sup>

## 2. The State and Local Perspective

Looking beyond the federal figures, the degree of this crisis varies greatly from one community to the next. While federal statistics show the national graduation rate at 74 percent, in many states it is much higher.<sup>4</sup> In Nevada, for example, only 53.5 percent of high school students earn a diploma after four years of high school.<sup>5</sup> In Nebraska, Wisconsin and Iowa nearly 88 percent of high schools seniors earn a diploma after four years.

These figures are important because much of the policy that drives what happens in the local classroom is set by the state. These policies may impact why certain students are more at risk. And policy may even drive what data is collected to identify students who are at risk of dropping out.

Other research has shown differences in urban, rural and suburban settings. One study found that while 74 percent of students in suburban school districts graduated, only 58 percent of urban students were able to do so.<sup>6</sup>

Other studies have narrowed the focus even more, calling 2,000 of the more than 20,000 high schools in the United States “dropout factories” because they account for more than half of the nation’s dropouts.<sup>7</sup>

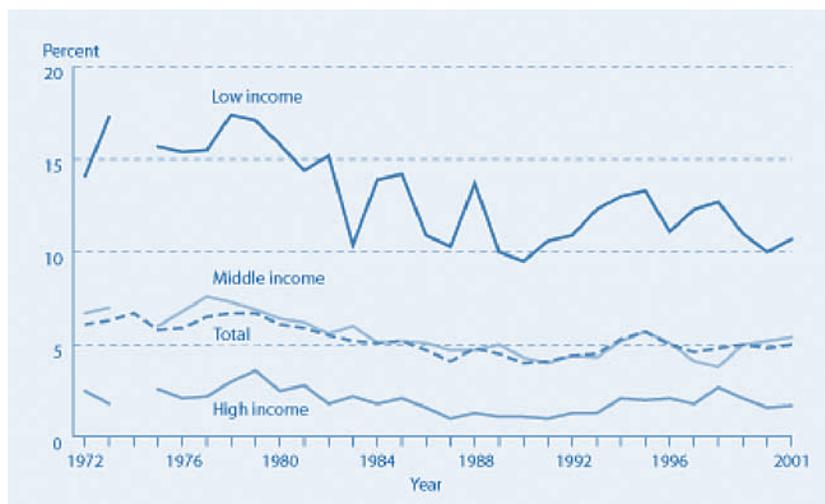
## 3. The Student Perspective

Certain groups of students drop out at higher rates, as well. While racial and ethnic groups have shown improvement, a wide gap still exists between white, African American and Hispanic students.

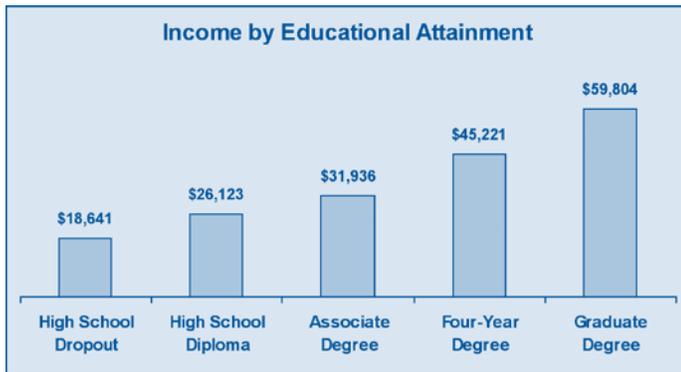
Some have argued that the decrease in the dropout rate in the United States is misleading because large numbers of students are in non-education systems, like juvenile justice system where they are not counted as dropouts.<sup>8</sup> Students of color also account for a particularly high number of GED recipients. Male students of color who complete high school are almost twice as likely as white males to have a GED rather than a diploma.<sup>9</sup> A significant number of these are obtained in prison—accounting for more than 10 percent of all GED certificates issued in the United States each year.<sup>10</sup>

Income levels also reveal differences, with students from low-income families dropping out at much higher rates than their peers from middle- and high-income families. This is especially troubling, as evidence shows that earning a high school diploma is the single most powerful predictor of a family’s ability to break the cycle of poverty.<sup>11</sup>

Dropouts By Family Income 1972-2001



Source: Kaufman, P., and Chapman, C., 2004.



Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2006

There are also differences in students with learning disabilities and/or language barriers. English language learners, for example, are more likely to drop out than students whose first language is English.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, students with learning disabilities may be more likely to leave school.

## B. Benefits of Graduating On-time and Costs of Dropping Out

### 1. Economic Outcomes

Whereas a diploma once gave a high school graduate a leg up in the workforce, in today’s global economy it is a bare minimum to entry, placing dropouts in a particularly precarious

situation. Recent surveys of employers show that high school graduates are ill-prepared for the 21st century workplace in comparison with their peers who have additional years of education, earning scores of “deficient” in 10 areas of workforce readiness.<sup>13</sup>

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the 30 fastest-growing occupations include 19 jobs that require at least a bachelor’s degree.<sup>14</sup> When you look at the reverse, nearly all of the 30 fastest-declining occupations require only minimal on-the-job-training. This points to a troubling future for dropouts as the reality sets in that at least some post-secondary education will be a necessity for many of the available jobs.

This trend toward more education is expected to continue, with greater economic benefits going to those with more years of education. And the benefits go beyond years of employment to include home ownership and value, and living conditions.

On-time graduation—completing high school in four years—is also critical because people who earn a General Educational Diploma, or GED, often encounter many of the same economic

## GED Tests

General Educational Development (GED) tests are a group of five tests and one essay that assess high school-level academic skills.

The GED began as a small program to assist veterans who left high school to serve in the armed forces in World War II. In 1960 just two percent of high school credentials were awarded through the GED program. By 2001, nearly 20 percent of all new high school credentials were achieved via the GED program—a trend that continues as increasingly more high school students leave school and opt for a passing score on the GED test in lieu of a diploma.<sup>16</sup>

The GED is generally accepted as equivalent to a high school diploma for college admissions, the military, and eligibility for job training and

financial aid programs. Yet GED recipients often encounter many of the same obstacles as dropouts and have similar economic and social outcomes.<sup>17</sup>

The GED debate is one that plays heavily in how graduation rates are calculated, with most arguing that students who pass the GED not be counted in the graduation rate. Others say that the GED does not meet the same standards as high school graduation: not only is the content not as rigorous, but a student can retake any of the five portions of the test as often as needed to earn a passing score.

**Approximately 75 percent of state prison inmates did not complete high school. Projections indicate that a 5 percent increase in the male high school graduation rate would save about \$4.9 billion in related crime costs each year.**

**—Alliance for Excellent Education**

outcomes as those who never earn a high school diploma, including fewer employment opportunities and lower pay.<sup>15</sup>

The direct economic benefits of a high school diploma are well documented: An individual with a high school diploma will earn on average 74 percent more over a lifetime than a high school dropout.<sup>18</sup> Another researcher estimated the difference at about \$260,000 over the course of a lifetime.<sup>19</sup>

That places 14 percent of the dropouts in the workforce with earnings below the poverty line.<sup>20</sup> That's in comparison with just 1.7 percent of their peers who earned a college degree. What's more, those who earn a diploma are also 15 percent more likely to be employed than their peers who drop out.<sup>21</sup>

## **2. Social Outcomes**

Dropping out of high school is associated with numerous negative long-term outcomes. Dropouts are significantly more likely to receive public assistance, and for longer periods of time, than those who earn at least a high school diploma.<sup>22</sup>

Dropouts are more likely to have long-term health issues, be divorced, and have children that also drop out of high school. They have higher mortality rates, higher suicide rates, and higher rates of admission to mental health programs in hospitals. The death rate for high school dropouts, for example, is two-and-a-half times greater than those with 13 years of education or more.<sup>23</sup>

They are also more likely to be in prison. More than three-quarters of men and women in the prison population are dropouts.<sup>24</sup>

Dropouts exact substantial costs associated with increased incarceration, health care, social welfare programs, and social services.<sup>25</sup> Beyond the financial implications to society, dropping out also results in lower civic engagement.

## **C. Calculating the Graduation Rate**

How the graduation rate is calculated is one of the most contested debates in education. There are so many calculations, that depending on data sources, definitions, and methods, the national graduation rate is estimated to be as low as 66 percent and as high as 88 percent. The federal government and numerous think tanks and researchers have invested enormous capital into crafting the most accurate calculation. State education agencies and local school districts also compute figures, adding to the mix of methodologies.

What's at play is who is counted, when and for what. The best calculations follow a method that looks at individual students in a particular cohort as they enter and leave high school. Others look at anonymous enrollments of ninth-grade students who earn diplomas as a proportion of all ninth-graders, or some formula to estimate ninth-graders. Still other rates may count those who pass the GED as graduating in order to see who has "completed" secondary school.

For a local community working to set a goal to reduce the dropout rate, this can create confusion. The best strategy is to make sure that comparison between local, regional, state and federal graduation rates all follow a similar methodology or make note of differences.

For our purposes, United Way uses the averaged freshman graduation rate to estimate the on-time graduation rate.<sup>26</sup> This is the method recommended by the National Center for Education Statistics.<sup>27</sup>

In 2005, the 50 governors signed a compact promising to adopt an accurate and consistent measure of graduation.<sup>28</sup> New rules proposed by the U.S. Department of Education include directives to create such consistency through a single federally defined rate. This enormous push to standardize measures is important to keep in mind, as calculations might change from one year to the next.

## D. Why Students Drop Out

Research suggests that dropping out of school is not a single event, but instead the culmination of many events over time.<sup>29</sup> Various aspects of schooling, individual student characteristics, and home and family circumstances can all impact a student's decision to drop out or a gradual process of disengagement. Adding to this strong body of research there is also evidence of key building blocks that, when in place, increase the likelihood a student will graduate on time.

The sections that follow identify some of these building blocks and barriers. Each community must, however, discover their own specific barriers and underlying issues.

## 1. Building Blocks for On-Time Graduation

A number of organizations have developed research-based frameworks for thinking about what students need in order to succeed, both at school and beyond.

The Coalition for Community Schools has a similar framework referred to as the conditions for learning:

- The school has a core instructional program with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for students.
- Students are motivated and engaged in learning—both in school and in community settings, during and after school.
- The basic physical, mental and emotional health needs of young people and their families are recognized and addressed.
- There is mutual respect and effective collaboration among parents, families and school staff.
- Community engagement, together with school efforts, promotes a school climate that is safe, supportive and respectful and connects students to a broader learning community.<sup>30</sup>
- Opportunities for skill building.
- Integration of family, school and community efforts.

The National Research Council also has some similar components in its framework, including the importance of physical and physiological safety; supportive relationships; opportunities to belong and positive social norms.<sup>31</sup>

Unfortunately, the body of research on the building blocks for success is not as expansive as the grounding for the barriers and obstacles to success.

## Warning Signs

One comprehensive study has made a substantial contribution towards understanding dropout risk factors. After examining 25 years of academic literature, including 44 major studies, the authors examined the interconnectedness of the individual student, the family, and school by elementary, middle, and high school, developing a visual representation of the leading dropout risk factors and when they occur.

Risk Category and Risk Factor	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
<b>School Performance</b>			
Low achievement	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓
Retention/over-age for grade	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓
<b>School Engagement</b>			
Poor attendance	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓
Low educational expectations		✓ ✓	✓ ✓
Lack of effort		✓	✓
Low commitment to school		✓	✓ ✓
No extracurricular participation		✓	✓ ✓
<b>Family Background Characteristics</b>			
Low socioeconomic status		✓ ✓	✓ ✓
High family mobility		✓ ✓	
Low education level of parents	✓	✓	✓ ✓
Large number of siblings	✓		✓
Not living with both natural parents	✓	✓	✓ ✓
Family disruption	✓		
<b>School Behavior</b>			
Misbehavior	✓	✓	✓ ✓
Early aggression	✓	✓	
<b>Early Adult Responsibilities</b>			
High number of work hours		✓	✓ ✓
Parenthood			✓ ✓
<b>Social Attitudes, Values, and Behavior</b>			
High-risk peer group		✓ ✓	✓
High-risk social behavior		✓ ✓	✓
Highly socially active outside of school			✓
<b>Family Engagement/Commitment to Education</b>			
Low educational expectations		✓ ✓	
Sibling has dropped out		✓	✓
Low contact with school		✓ ✓	
Lack of conversation about school		✓ ✓	✓
<b>Individual Background Characteristics</b>			
Has a learning disability or emotional disturbance		✓	✓

Key: One checkmark (✓) indicates the risk factor was found to be (statistically) significantly related to dropping out of school in one study. Two checkmarks (✓ ✓) indicate the risk factor was found to be significantly related to dropping out of school in more than one study.

Source: Hammond, Linton, Smink, and Drew, 2007

## 2. Barriers to On-Time Graduation

These factors cut across the individual student, his or her family, the school, and even the larger community—and all are inextricably linked to one another in their ability to help or hinder a student.<sup>32</sup> What’s more, these factors often progress throughout the spectrum of a student’s educational career, with some showing up even before entry to school.

### a. Individual Student Factors

All students bring with them a variety of circumstances, experiences and learning styles that present unique challenges and opportunities to school success, such as:

- **Cognitive and Emotional Disabilities.** Students with cognitive (learning) and emotional disabilities have been found to have similar types of risk factors for dropping out as other students. However, they are more likely to have multiple risk factors than other students.<sup>33</sup> Students diagnosed as seriously emotionally disturbed are particularly vulnerable to dropping out.<sup>34</sup>
- **Absenteeism, Failure to Progress from Grade to Grade and Behavior Problems.** Patterns of absenteeism, poor grades, and poor academic achievement on tests in early elementary school are linked to dropping out in later grades. Students who were absent three or more times the previous school year were more likely to drop out than students who were absent two times or less.<sup>35</sup> Chronic absenteeism, observed as early as kindergarten, is also tied to lower achievement levels in fifth grade, especially for low-income children.<sup>36</sup> And failure in any course, as well as the number of “Fs” earned in core academic courses is an equally strong predictor.<sup>37</sup>

Students who had repeated grades eight, nine or 10 were much more likely to drop out than students who had not repeated one of these grades.<sup>38</sup>

And disciplinary problems that result in suspension or probation are also strong predictors of dropping out, even for students not experiencing academic difficulties.<sup>39</sup>

Students who have friends who have dropped out of school are also more likely to drop out of school than those who had no friends that had dropped out of school.<sup>40</sup>

- **High-Risk Behavior.** Substance abuse—regardless of the form—is linked to academic performance.<sup>41</sup> Students who use alcohol or drugs are at greater risk for failing in school and students who perform poorly in school are at a greater risk for substance abuse. And student substance rates are rising.

According to results from the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) 45 percent of students in grades nine through 12 reported using alcohol in the previous 30-day period; 75 percent reported trying alcohol at least once during their lifetime.<sup>42</sup> Another 38 percent of students had tried marijuana one or more times during their life and seven percent cocaine.<sup>43</sup>

A recent study by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration showed a strong link between academic performance and substance abuse:

- Of students who reported no alcohol or drug use in the past month, 72 percent reported an A or B average in their last semester
- Sixty-seven percent of students who used alcohol during the same period had an A or B average, and
- For students who binge drink, the figures dropped to 58 percent.

Marijuana use is similar:

- Of students reporting no use, 72 percent earned an A or B average
  - Of those who used one to four days, 58 percent earned an A or B average, and
  - Of those who reported using more than five days in the past month, only 50 percent earned an A or B average.
- **Violence and Crime.** Harassment, bullying, crime, violence at school and outside of school, and/or suspension, arrest, conviction and incarceration affects the success of all involved, from students to families, schools and communities.

The most recent YRBS study found that 35 percent of students had been in a physical fight at least once in the past 12 months.<sup>44</sup> Another 27 percent reported having property stolen or deliberately damaged on school property.

Another study found that 28 percent of middle- and high-school students had experienced bullying at school.<sup>45</sup> And repeated bullying incidents can lead to missed school, lower student achievement and dropping out altogether.<sup>46</sup> Almost six percent of students in the YRBS study reported not attending school at least once in the 30-day period prior to the survey because they felt unsafe.

- **Mental Health Needs.** The relationship between mental health and student success is complex and interrelated. Poor performance in school can lead to emotional problems, which if left untreated, can lead to a host of more serious

troubles such as dropping out of school, substance abuse or violence.<sup>47</sup> The reverse can also be true: left untreated, mental health disorders can contribute to poor performance in school, which again, can ultimately lead to dropping out, or worse.<sup>48</sup>

It has been estimated that between 12 and 22 percent of all school-aged youth under 18 need help for mental, emotional or behavior problems.<sup>49</sup> For urban schools, the figures skyrocket to an estimated 50 percent of youth. Unfortunately, only about one-quarter of those students receive services.<sup>50</sup>

Another study found that 54 percent of children who had been in foster care had one or more mental health problems.<sup>51</sup>

- **Early Adult Responsibilities.** Early adult responsibilities can also stand in the way of a student obtaining a high school diploma. One such responsibility is working more than 20 hours per week, which increases the likelihood of a student dropping out regardless of gender, race, or socioeconomic status.<sup>52</sup>

Teenage pregnancy is also cited as a reason for dropping out—yet the research is mixed.

Studies that consider the decision to become pregnant and the decision to drop out as independent tend to show that pregnancy leads to an increased likelihood of dropping out. However, studies that try to take into account the unobservable factors that lead to teenage pregnancy and dropping out, find that pregnancy has no independent effect on dropping out. These studies suggest that the underlying factors, such as family situation, that put youth at risk for teen pregnancy also put youth at risk for dropping out.<sup>53</sup>

## Top Reasons Students Give for Dropping Out of School

### WHAT STUDENTS SAY

A large-scale study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education surveyed dropouts on their reasons for leaving. Most frequently mentioned: chronic absenteeism, poor grades, inability to keep up with school work, a dislike of school, and thinking that a GED would be an easier route than earning a diploma.<sup>54</sup>

Reason for Dropping Out	Percent of Respondents
Missed too many days of school	43.5
Thought it would be easier to get a GED	40.5
Getting poor grades/failing school	38.0
Did not like school	36.6
Could not keep up with school work	32.1
Became pregnant	27.8
Got a job	27.8
Thought could not complete course requirements	25.6
Could not get along with teachers	25.0
Could not work at same time	21.7
Had to support family	20.0
Did not feel belonged there	19.9
Could not get along with other students	18.7
Was suspended from school	16.9
Had to care for a family member	15.5
Became father/mother of a baby	14.4
Had changed schools and did not like new one	11.2
Thought would fail competency test	10.5
Did not feel safe	10.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2006

Another survey of high school dropouts found similar results, with students saying:

- Classes were not very interesting
- I missed too many days and couldn't catch up
- I spent time with people not interested in school
- I had too much freedom and not enough rules in my life, and
- I was failing school.<sup>55</sup>

## What is a family?

Research consistently links family behaviors to children's educational attainment. And family can mean many different things.

Children and youth may have foster parents, adoptive parents, a single parent, grandparent(s) or other relatives. When thinking about obstacles to graduation and strategies for improving graduation rates, it is critical to consider that students may have different primary caregivers.

### b. Family/Primary Caregiver Factors

Families and caregivers play a crucial role in supporting education and their children's engagement in school. There is a strong relationship between family income and parent education, and student educational engagement and achievement. The link between family income and education reach into many areas of a child's life and can manifest in different ways: fewer books in the home; less access to computers and internet resources; less enthusiasm and support for education; greater residential or school mobility; lower interest or comfort levels in assisting with homework; lower educational expectations; limited ability to support extracurricular activities; need for the child to help support the family financially; and potentially lower post-secondary educational aspirations.<sup>56</sup> Some family factors are described below.

- **High Mobility.** Residential mobility and school mobility both have a direct relationship to school performance and achievement in all grades. Both increase the risk of dropping out of high school.<sup>57</sup> One study found that the majority of high school dropouts changed schools at least once before withdrawing, while the majority of high school graduates did not.<sup>58</sup>

Mobility is perhaps most acutely felt by the homeless student population.<sup>59</sup> Estimates show that 28 percent of homeless children

attend three or more schools in a single year. Just getting enrolled is a challenge: homeless or foster care children may lack medical and academic records. Perhaps most troubling, these children are twice as likely to repeat a grade as their peers, and twice the number have special learning needs and three times have emotional and behavioral problems.

- **Family Disruption and Adverse Parenting / Primary Caregiver Practices.** Undesirable parenting practices by a parent or primary caregiver and/or maltreatment can impede student success.

Abused children are significantly more likely to have lower GPAs and problems completing homework. Maltreated children receive lower performance ratings from their teachers, score lower on cognitive assessments, and are more likely to be suspended or retained in grade.<sup>60</sup> One study found that maltreated children are substantially more likely than nonmaltreated children to repeat kindergarten and first grade.

Some studies have also found that children experiencing exposure to chronic violence may also exhibit symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder.<sup>61</sup>

- **Primary Caregiver Disengagement.** Research shows that when families are not engaged in supporting learning and/or are not connected with their children, students are more likely to disengage with school. There is also a link between financial capital and social capital.

The findings indicate that families with fewer financial resources are less likely to be engaged with their child’s school and the community, and are less likely to have the resources needed for educational opportunities outside of school.

Youth whose parents have high academic expectations and are familiar with college preparation requirements are most likely to graduate high school and attend college.<sup>62</sup>

### c. School Factors<sup>63</sup>

Schools face a particularly challenging situation, as educators are often expected to go beyond the academic focus and tackle non-academic issues for children, including family and societal issues that are often beyond their control. Many recognize we are asking a lot of our schools—roughly two-thirds of the general public say much of what schools manage should be handled by parents, yet there is still a strong feeling that schools are uniquely positioned to undertake these issues.<sup>64</sup>

School-related factors that can impact the decision to drop out can be both structural and cultural. Some of these factors are described below.

- **Lack of Early Warning Systems.** Research points to numerous school-level warning signs that a student may be at risk of dropping out. Yet schools struggle to develop and maintain high-quality data tracking systems, which could allow schools to regularly analyze student information, such as absenteeism, grade retention, class grades and even delinquency all in one place. Without such mechanisms, schools and districts cannot identify current and future students who are at high risk of dropping out, nor can they effectively target dropout prevention measures.

Decisions about data collection and management are often made at the federal, and especially state levels of government. What’s more, while large urban districts and wealthier suburban schools may have staff assigned to handle the development and management of

such systems, small rural schools and high-poverty schools rarely have staff. In these schools, data gathering often falls to the school administrator, who may not have the training and experience for such a task.

Accountability policy and practice is another factor that impacts the gathering of data. Schools sometimes are held accountable in a punitive manner for certain statistics, leaving them with little incentive for gathering and accurately reporting some measures. Instead of offering supports to turn around problem areas, such as high absenteeism, crime and delinquency, schools are instead, often punished for having these problems. This leaves school leaders in a catch-twenty-two.

Consistency is also a problem. The calculation of the graduation rate is just one example of how varied data reporting can be.

- **Student Disengagement.** Student engagement can focus on many different aspects. One body of research says that it encompasses behavioral, emotional and cognitive domains.<sup>66</sup> On the behavioral front, students who are engaged participate in school related activities, academic learning, and behave in a positive manner. Being emotionally engaged includes having relationships with teachers, peers and academics. And cognitive engagement includes an investment in learning and a willingness to go beyond basic requirements.

Research also shows that students often disengage from school because they don’t find the material interesting or challenging, and they fail to see the benefits of earning a high school diploma. Further research has shown that teacher expectations and academic climate, such as the amount of homework students do and the number of rigorous academic courses taken also play a role. Recent reform efforts have targeted this problem, calling for more rigor and relevance in both middle and high schools across the nation.

Some schools also fall short by not responding to the diversity of learning styles in their student body, or by not involving students in the learning process. This is especially true in schools that don't allow flexibility in teaching methods and/or motivational strategies.

- **Fostering an Environment that is Physically and Psychologically Unsafe.** Issues of school culture and learning environment can greatly affect a student's school success. If a school tolerates bullying, violence, and crime, its students will be at a greater risk for dropping out.

Research also shows that the makeup of the school itself can be an obstacle to graduation. We know that graduation rates are significantly lower in school systems with higher levels of poverty and segregation.<sup>67</sup> Large school size, particularly for low socioeconomic status (SES) schools can also lead to higher dropout rates.<sup>68</sup>

- **Fostering an Environment Where Educators Do Not Feel Empowered to Share Their Own Learning, and Improve Their Practice.** A review of research by the National Research Council on programs designed to reduce dropouts found that students' engagement in learning was impaired if a school's climate was not characterized by an ethic of caring and supportive relationships, respect, fairness and trust, and lacked teachers with a sense of shared responsibility and efficacy related to student learning and success.

Schools in which educators are not empowered to seek, share, and act on their learning in order to improve practice face an uphill battle to improve their graduation rate.

Professional development opportunities are available for many teachers and out-of-school time professionals, and can be a valuable tool for teachers to hone their skills. However, many times the professional development is short-term, without relevance to core competencies, current curricula or program goals and without real life application.

## d. Other Systemic Factors

Much attention is paid to individual, family, and school factors in relation to the dropout issue, but the influence of other systems that impact children and their families is often unexamined. Many of these systems, and the organizations within them, create roadblocks for students and their families as they strive for educational success. These systems can vary by state or community, but this summary focuses on systems that most often connect (or fail to connect with) students who are most at-risk of dropping out, including child welfare, juvenile justice and law enforcement, mental health, substance abuse, and other youth and family supporting agencies. Two categories of system barriers will be examined: Poor coordination across organizations and systems and a lack of focus by them on supporting educational attainment.

- **Poor Coordination.** A lack of communication and coordination across all of these systems—including education—often creates obstacles for students and families. These systems tend to work in silos, often created by funding streams at the federal and state level. But research tells us just how linked all of these systems and their related issues are; problems tend to cluster, meaning students rarely experience just one at a time.

For example, more than half of students in foster care are in need of mental health services.<sup>69</sup> Take that one step further, 30 to 40 percent of kids in foster care need special education services. Most of the children are in need of services for behavioral issues. Below are some examples of the barriers presented by each of the systems.

### *Juvenile justice*

On the juvenile justice front, students who are arrested and incarcerated or placed in an alternate education setting often have trouble transitioning back into the traditional school setting, which can lead to low attendance,

trouble keeping up with the curriculum, and poor student achievement, and possibly recidivism.<sup>70</sup> One study found that more than two-thirds of offenders did not even return to high school.<sup>71</sup> Coupled with that, frequent absenteeism, which is a precursor to delinquent behavior—and dropping out—is often mismanaged by school and law enforcement officials.

Coordinating efforts is an enormous challenge. Being the victim or perpetrator of violence can stem from many inter-related problems, such as mental health, substance abuse, and even previous experiences in victimization. What’s more, students enter into and leave many different “systems.” A student who commits a crime may first deal with expulsion from school, arrest and conviction through the court system, continued education while incarcerated, coupled with re-entry into the community. More problematic, there is limited research on student re-entry into the traditional school setting following custody or alternative schooling.<sup>72</sup>

#### *Mental health and substance abuse*

While it might be expected that the mental health system would provide such services to youth, schools are often the primary source of services for school-aged children and young adults.<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately, as the Center for Mental Health in Schools reports, there has been no comprehensive mapping of mental health services in schools—both in terms of what services are offered and by whom. This has led to fragmented, piecemeal services and oftentimes overlapping efforts between school-based and external providers.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, this problem leads to behavior health services and supports for adolescents not being available in areas where there is a high incidence of dropouts.

In an article on coordinating substance abuse prevention, Adelman and Taylor noted the conflicting messages that kids get about substance abuse: it’s wrong according to schools, but glamorized by much of the rest of society. This makes it challenging to identify and treat a problem, and places schools in an up-hill, often lonely battle of removing risk behaviors.

#### *Child Welfare*

There are over half a million children in foster care in the United States that are affected by these issues. Children in foster care perform significantly worse in school than children in the general population. They experience higher rates of grade retention, lower test scores, and higher rates of absenteeism, tardiness, truancy, and dropping out.<sup>75</sup>

The reason for the abysmal school performance is twofold: First, prior to being placed in foster care, these children have typically experienced physical as well as emotional trauma—prenatal exposure to alcohol and drugs; physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse; neglect and/or abandonment; and exposure to violence. Second, once they are in the system, they often experience numerous changes in placement that result in changes in schools. School mobility is closely tied to disengagement which all too often leads to dropping out of school.

### *Youth-Supporting Organizations*

As with other systems of support for students and their families there is a lack of effective communication and coordination across agencies and programs serving youth in after-school and other out-of-school environments. One underlying issue is that there is too little data on these youth-supporting services—what populations or neighborhoods are served, where they are offered (school, church, work-site), what specific services are and are not offered and/or used, or the quality of those services. Young people and parents report that they do not know what’s available. Practitioners and program directors frequently operate in unproductive silos. Decision-makers and funders claim to have only fragments of the information they want and need about service and population reach and gaps. And the public is typically either under-informed or confused.<sup>76</sup>

Without this information it is hard to know how to improve program participation or quality, and how to develop programs that provide the most-needed services. This is also an obstacle in building a network of supports with other partnering systems and agencies that could help students address the barriers to graduation.

- **Lack of Focus on Educational Attainment.** Each non-school system has its own goals, and these goals often do not directly relate to education. Juvenile justice works to curb delinquency and crime. Mental health focuses on identification and treatment of mental health issues. And so on. What is missing is a sense of ownership across systems for improving the educational attainment of young people and a strong

understanding that doing so will improve outcomes across all systems. Below are examples of the barriers from some of the systems.

### *Juvenile Justice*

Research on juvenile justice tells us that delinquent behavior is less likely when a school-aged youth is connected to an adult, school and work, and that prevention and early intervention are keys to success.<sup>77</sup> Unfortunately, most juvenile justice systems do not focus on the prevention and early intervention components. Instead systems focus on law enforcement and individualized treatment. As one researcher puts it, “students are either punished or treated, either deterred or rehabilitated.”<sup>78</sup> The zero-tolerance policies of recent decades are just one of the many examples of the punitive focus on delinquent youth.

### *Child Welfare*

In many states, the lines of responsibility for educational outcomes of children in foster care are unclear and no single person or agency is held accountable. Schools, child welfare agencies, and other service providers do not coordinate their efforts. And children in foster care typically lack a consistent and knowledgeable adult who can advocate on their behalf for special education and other needed services.

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## III. NATIONAL RESEARCH ON STRATEGIES THAT WORK

### What will go in your Mobilization Plan?

This section presents a summary (2 to 4 pages) of:

- The high-level strategies focused on youth, their families, schools, and other relevant community systems that the NPC Mobilization Plan Task Force has identified as needed to address the graduation issue
- Specific approaches to implementing the strategies that research shows are effective in addressing major obstacles to graduation or risk factors for dropping out

### What's here now?

1. Summaries of high-level strategies that the NPC Mobilization Plan Task Force has identified as needed to address the graduation issue
2. Descriptions of and research supporting the effectiveness of specific approaches to implementing those strategies

### What's the guidance for creating this section?

Although you will use in your local Mobilization Plan the summaries of high-level strategies that are provided in the Blueprint, you will not include all of the research on specific approaches. After your community partnership has selected the specific approaches you will use to implement the high-level strategies, you can pull out the research on your selected approaches for this section of your Plan.

The following section is a starting point.

## Using High-level Strategies

In order to successfully lower the dropout rate and simultaneously raise the graduation rate in any community, it is necessary to undertake a comprehensive effort that includes four high-level strategies. Any effort to implement these strategies will require input and support from across the community. Assembling a community partnership representing various segments of the community is a crucial first step in putting these strategies to work.

While a comprehensive approach to dropout prevention begins long before children enter school, the strategies in this plan focus on the success of students in middle and high school. They have been effective in addressing commonly identified, research-based obstacles in diverse communities and include approaches that target not only youth and their families but also organizations, systems, and networks that affect them. And they go beyond delivering direct services to address policy, practice, system, and other community changes. **The diagram on the next page illustrates the interrelationships between the following highlighted strategies.**

### High-level Strategy 1: Identify Students at Risk of Dropping Out and Connect them With the Resources They Need

To ensure on-time student graduation it is essential to prevent at-risk middle school and younger students from falling “off track” and to intervene with those already significantly off-track in later years.<sup>1</sup> And younger may mean much younger. For example, the students who will graduate in ten years are now in second grade.

And school data may show that children are dropping out much earlier than many realize.

Regularly collecting and analyzing student and community data is the critical first step for determining the scope of the dropout problem. Identifying at-risk students who are in need of extra services or supports, identifying community resources and challenges and creating an effective early warning and dropout prevention system is the next step.<sup>2</sup>

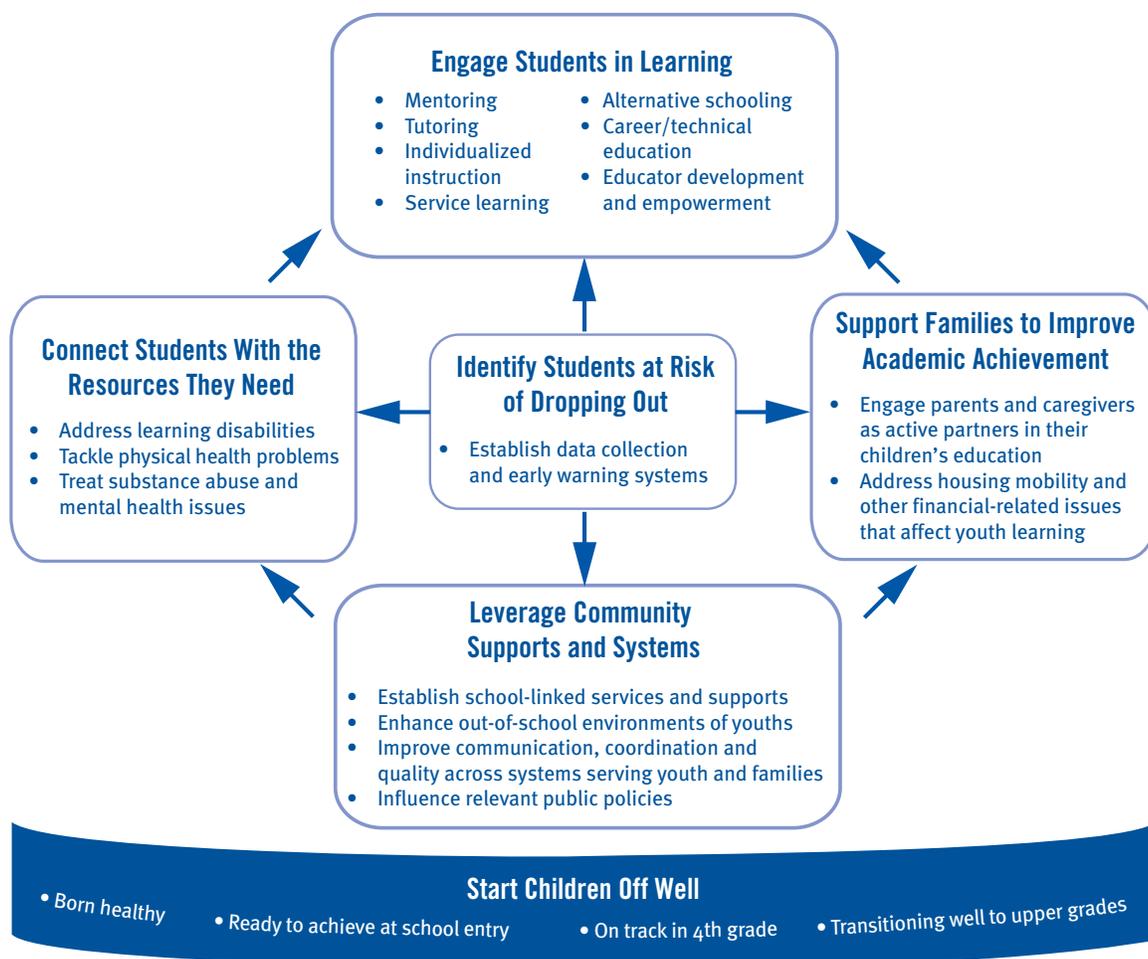
### High-level Strategy 2: Engage Students in Learning

A student’s disengagement from school can lead to sporadic attendance, poor performance, and ultimately grade retention. All of these are warning signs that indicate an increased risk of dropping out. Ensuring on-time graduation requires schools and communities to look for innovative and relevant ways to engage students in learning, both in and out of the classroom.

It is critical to use our knowledge about how children learn and become inquisitive and analytical thinkers to frame their cognitive and developmental experiences throughout the day early to late - and year round.

There are several research-based approaches that can encourage student engagement with school, family and community supports for academic success. These include mentoring, tutoring, service learning, and providing an enriching, safe, and supportive environment to students.

## HIGH-LEVEL STRATEGIES TO REDUCE DROPOUT RATES



### High-level Strategy 3: Support Families to Improve Academic Achievement

The involvement of parents, caregivers, and other caring adults in children's learning, both at home and at school can be strengthened when there is a match among youth's developmental needs, parents' and caregivers' attitudes and practices, and schools' expectations and support of family involvement.<sup>3</sup>

Providing increased access to parent education and family support resources can help parents negotiate conflicts or crises that result in a decrease in problems that can lead their children to leave school.<sup>4</sup> Encouraging parents to monitor the academic and social activities of adolescents and providing support to parents and guardians of adolescents can lead to lower rates of delinquency and higher rates of social competence and academic growth.

Welcoming schools, opportunities for families to be engaged at school in multiple ways, effective school-linked services approaches, and peer-led family engagement programs all can contribute to family-school partnerships that support student success.

Considering the impact of residential mobility of families on school achievement it is important to enhance income and job stability so families can stay in their current housing as well as preserve and expand affordable housing. In addition, because family stress associated with poverty and/or other challenges diminishes children's likelihood of finishing high school, connecting families with financial assistance in times of need is critical to supporting students. In addition, strategies should be put in place that help families gain the stability-through savings and asset building-that will allow them to plan for and accomplish their long-term financial needs and goals

## High-level Strategy 4: Leverage Community Systems and Supports

To successfully implement the previous three strategies it is necessary to improve communication, coordination, and quality across systems serving youth so that they work together to address the challenges faced by each child and their family in a comprehensive manner.

A critical first step is to map services and supports, both in terms of what services are offered and by whom, and then plan for coordination and deployment to ensure availability of appropriate supports for students and their caregivers in areas where there is a high incidence of students dropping out. Once a plan of action is implemented advocacy and public policy work is often necessary to sustain these approaches.

Besides the changes in policy, practice and culture necessary for improved communication and coordination across systems the plan should also include establishment of new system-specific policies and practices shown by research and direct experience to improve graduation rates.

## Research-Based Approaches to Increase On-time Graduation

The following approaches target either one or more of the four high-level strategies. These approaches are intended to be a starting point for your planning efforts, and do not represent the full scope and breadth of possible approaches. These strategies are still being reviewed and revised, and should be viewed as such.

These approaches are not presented in a hierarchy or order of importance. Different approaches will be more or less effective, depending on the situation in the local community. For the sake of simplicity, each approach is categorized under the high-level strategy with which it most closely aligns. If an approach also relates to other strategies, you will find them listed in parenthesis by number (1,2,3,4) after the name of the approach. Refer

to the “Approaches by High-level Strategy” chart for a more complete picture of how the individual approaches cut across the four strategies.

## High-level Strategy 1: Identify students at risk of dropping out and connect them with the resources they need

### • Establish early warning systems for youths at risk of dropping out (4)

Schools can use readily available data to predict whether students are likely to drop out of school before graduation. And early warning systems that allow schools and districts to identify current and future students who are at high risk of dropping out, making them better able to target dropout prevention measures.<sup>5</sup>

Because warning signals such as first month, first quarter and first semester absences, poor test scores or difficulty making grade-to-grade and school transitions start so early, it is critical that programs targeting high school or even middle school students be supplemented with earlier interventions in and before elementary school.<sup>6</sup> United Way’s experience in early childhood strategies through its Success By 6 initiative is an asset to build upon in this area.

### • Address issues students face (2,3,4)

Research and experience confirm that young people need a wide range of opportunities and supports to address challenges. It is critical to use approaches proven to effectively tackle mental health (e.g., Cognitive Behavioral Treatment for Trauma in Schools, Multisystemic therapy), violence and crime (e.g., teen courts, Life Skills Training, Conflict Resolution Curriculum, Positive Adolescent Choices and Anger-management training), and substance abuse. School-linked services (see Establish school-linked services and supports ) are an effective delivery mechanism to respond to these problems that impede student success. Guidance on what issues to look for can be found on page 15 in Section II, Barriers to On-Time Graduation.



For more information on early warning systems visit <http://online.unitedway.org/earlywarningsystems>

- **Evaluate the need for alternative programs that address the individual social needs and academic requirements of students at risk of dropping out (2,3,4)**

All students have unique needs. Reviewing both qualitative and quantitative student data can reveal specific students that need attention in specific areas.

Once data has been gathered and reviewed, there are a number of school-level strategies that have been operating with varied degrees of success. These models of alternative schools include:

- The Alternative Classroom. Designed as a self-contained classroom within a traditional school, simply offering varied programs in a different environment.
  - The School-Within-a-School. Housed within a traditional school, but having semiautonomous or specialized educational programs.
  - The Separate Alternative School. Separated from the regular school and having different academic and social adjustment programs.
  - The Continuation School. Developed for students no longer attending traditional schools, such as street academies for job-related training or parenting centers.
  - The Magnet School. A self-contained program offering an intensified curriculum in one or more subject areas such as math or science.<sup>7</sup>
- **Create a school climate that does not tolerate bullying, violence, or crime**  
Creating a safe school environment requires a focus on school culture and development of school safety plans. Some schools also include establishment of teen courts as well as peer counseling, anti-violence, and parent-focused interventions.<sup>8</sup>

Successful strategies include a focus on promoting a nonviolent environment that has

and enforces policies on safety precautions and student conduct. Non-punitive methods of control, encouraging student involvement in academic and after-school activities, and providing continuous support for staff are all promising interventions that can be effective in the school setting.

## High-level Strategy 2: Engage Students in Learning

- **Increase opportunities for mentoring relationships (4)**

Mentoring relationships, built on trust, have been shown to be extremely effective with at-risk youth. Formal mentoring programs arrange for adults or older youth to meet with youth around the community or after school, while informal mentoring happens as a result of natural bonds between young people and their teachers, religious leaders, and neighbors.

A particularly effective form of mentoring can occur through adult advocates. In this model, a trained adult such as a resource teacher, community member, social worker, social service agency staff, faith-based organization staff or volunteer is assigned to the students most at-risk of dropping out to foster an ongoing relationship. Meetings may be weekly or even daily depending on the urgency of the case. The key to this approach is recognizing that students who drop out experience difficulties in many aspects of their lives and that a caring adult can help them bridge these difficult periods without dropping out of school.<sup>9</sup> Feeling connected to a caring adult also has a strong link to avoiding risky health behaviors, which can in turn lead to academic problems.



For more information on mentoring visit <http://online.unitedway.org/mentoring>

- **Provide tutoring to address specific academic issues**

Tutoring and other enrichment programs address flagging academic performance and disengagement from school. It can fill in gaps in skills, prevent frustration from becoming debilitating, and enliven academic exercises that may seem boring or irrelevant.

Peer tutoring, when young people tutor young people, is growing popular for its ability to overcome barriers in struggling students and allow them to apply themselves more fully to academic work.<sup>10</sup>

One successful intervention includes tutoring four days a week for 1 to 2 hours daily, as part of a combination of services designed to help low-income and potential first-generation college students complete high school. A rigorous evaluation of the program found that students participating in the program completed school at a significantly higher rate. Tutors provide homework assistance, in varying amounts and intensity, for groups of 12 students—as part of another intervention that showed positive effects on staying in school.<sup>11</sup>

- **Provide an enriching, safe, and supportive environment to students during out-of-school time (3,4)**

The time that students spend outside of school can be used to encourage and teach them to become successful, productive adults. Out-of-school time can complement the work of schools by providing additional learning opportunities to help students get ahead. The structure, safety, and support of after-school programs can help foster solid work habits, good physical and mental health, and responsible citizenship—all building blocks of adult success.<sup>12</sup>

Promising out-of-school programs focus on SAFE features, which...

- Use **sequential** skill-building activities.
- **Actively** involve students in lessons.
- **Focus** on developing social skills.
- Concentrate activities on **explicit** target skills.<sup>13</sup>

- **Engage students by responding to their diverse learning styles and involving them in the learning process**

Individualized instruction can provide opportunities for students to learn at their own pace, in their own way, and to be successful. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is just one effective approach that provides the foundation for learning. The IEP is developed as a collaborative effort of students, teachers, parents, school administrators, and related services personnel. Alternative schools in particular have found individualized instruction valuable.

Active, experiential learning is vital to the construction of new knowledge. The most effective way to learn something for the first time is to connect it to prior knowledge. In order for the teacher to know each child's knowledge level pre-testing, questioning, and observation are used.<sup>14</sup> Instructional strategies that encourage knowledge building include: problem-based learning and reciprocal teaching; peer tutoring; cooperative learning; hands-on learning; journaling; projects; role play; simulation; and inquiry.<sup>15</sup>

Incorporating cultural competency training for teachers, staff and administrators in schools can also lead to improved learning for students. This can extend to out-of-school providers, as well.

- **Connect meaningful community service experiences with academic learning (4)**

Grounding classroom work in everyday experiences through thoughtfully organized community service projects gives students a sense of ownership in their communities. Good service-learning experiences help students to apply their academic skills and knowledge to address real needs in their communities, fostering responsibility and caring for others. When students participate in all levels of decision-making for service-learning experiences, they are more engaged in learning and in school in general.

Important implementation principles say that:

- Service-learning is effective only when students address real unmet needs or issues in a community
- It is important that young people are actively involved in decision making at all levels of the process.
- Service-learning must be linked to academic standards.
- Teachers involved in service-learning must be able to use a complex set of skills: identifying the most appropriate curriculum connections for a community project, leading reflection activities that help students deepen their learning, and moving from presenter-style teaching to coach-style teaching.
- Service-learning must be given adequate time and support by engaging a service-learning coordinator, integrating it within flexible in-school hours and within after-school programs.<sup>16</sup>



For more information on service learning visit <http://online.unitedway.org/servicelearning>

- **Create a culture in schools in which educators are empowered to seek, share, and act on their learning in order to improve their practice (1)**

It is important to ensure that teachers and staff learn new information and practices. The ability to transfer this knowledge into practice and these practices can go a long way in helping to create results for youth.

Providing professional development opportunities that encompass the whole child and bridge the academic and cognitive strategies with the developmental and social-emotional needs of students is an important component.<sup>17</sup>

- **Help students see the relevance of a good education for their futures (3,4)**

Many stakeholders outside of the school setting can contribute to workforce development efforts, helping students see the relevance of earning a high school diploma for their future economic self-sufficiency.

Many industries are willing and eager participants in this effort and provide standards, assessments and curriculum materials, and also offer internship opportunities for youth. Efforts that emphasize career development, workforce skills training and post-secondary learning can be effective.<sup>18</sup> Instead of closing doors by preparing student for just a job, schools and industry leaders should focus on students making choices about whether to move directly into a career, post-secondary education, or some combination of the two.<sup>19</sup>

Programs that link school to work enhance motivation; increase personal, social, and work competence; broaden occupation or industry knowledge; and help provide career guidance. Real-world experiences integrate academic and work-based skills, preparing all students to make the transition from school to a career.

At the school level, new models of career education aim to increase student engagement in school through strategies such as career guidance, internships and apprenticeships, and career academies.<sup>20</sup> In addition, tech prep programs focus on postsecondary education and typically lead to an associate's degree or licensure.

### High-level Strategy 3: Support Families to Improve Academic Achievement

- **Engage parents and caregivers as true, active partners in their children's education**

Approaches to improve collaboration between parents and schools include creating support systems for families, developing a school's capacity to work with families. Efforts should also focus on helping parents to understand that responsibility for students' educational development can be shared between families and schools.<sup>21</sup>



For more information on family and caregiver engagement visit <http://online.unitedway.org/familyengagement>

- **Connect families with the assistance they need to best support their children’s school success (1,4)**

Supporting financial health and parenting practices are the most critical assistance needed by families to address the dropout problem. To reduce family disruption and housing mobility It is important to help families increase their income to meet their basic needs, such as food, shelter, transportation, and utilities, while gaining the stability-through savings and asset building-that will allow them to plan for and accomplish their long-term financial needs and goals. To further combat mobility, schools can work with families to enable students to stay in the same school even if they move out of the school catchment area during the school year.

In the income area, it is important to help families increase their income through jobs that pay a living wage by supporting them in advancing on the career ladder to positions that are self-sustaining. This demands connecting them to income building alternatives such as higher education and vocational and technical training through community colleges and workforce development programs.

Increasing enrollment by these families in public and private benefits is also an effective income-generating strategy. Creating access points to these benefits connects individuals and families with important short-term resources that can serve as the bridge to financial independence.

Improving the financial stability of these families is also dependent on addressing financial management and literacy, improving credit worthiness, encouraging savings, and developing assets like home or business ownership.

Finally, use proven models for promoting positive parenting practices and strong families, such as the Strengthening Families Protective Factors. In addition, widely share information about adolescent child development with all parents.

## High-level Strategy 4: Understand and Leverage Youth-Serving Systems

- **Establish school-linked services and supports (1)**

School-linked services are brought about through a set of partnerships that mobilize a web of community resources such as after school enrichment, youth development, family support, health and mental health, parenting skills and adult education, and more. These supports connect to student learning and development.



For more information on school-linked services visit <http://online.unitedway.org/schoollinked services>

Considering that multiple supports—physical, behavioral, social *and* academic—are required for all students to succeed, these partnerships function as active agents of change, connecting school and community to share expertise and resources to educate youth with improved results.

Models like Community Schools open to everyone, day, evenings, and weekends, serve to strengthen families and the surrounding neighborhood. Community Schools are a well-accepted and proven model of school-linked services and supports. The Coalition for Community Schools provides the following guiding principles for creating successful community schools with:

- **Strong partnerships.** Partners share their resources and ex-pertise and work together to design community schools that improve outcomes for students.
- **Shared accountability for results.** Partners intentionally align resources and relationships toward specific, mutually agreed-upon results and commit to tracking and using those results to target, assess, and refine school success strategies.

- **High expectations for all.** Children, youth, and adults are expected to learn at high standards and to be contributing members of their community.
  - **Real-world learning.** Students apply their learning through service-learning, civic and environmental education. Youth are included as school and community problem-solvers.
  - **Integrated student services.** Through a single point of contact, students are linked to community-based, integrated services that reduce critical barriers to learning.
  - **Embracing of diversity.** Community schools foster respect and a positive identity for people of diverse backgrounds and commit to the welfare of the whole community.
- **Promote juvenile justice system policies and practices that prevent delinquency and crime and help students stay in school (1)**  
One strategy gaining attention is the positive youth development model, which focuses the juvenile system on proactive procedures, instead of reactive ones.<sup>22</sup> The premise of positive youth development, or PYD, is that youth “develop and flourish when they are connected to the right mix of opportunities, relationships and social assets.<sup>23</sup> The focus is on prevention and early intervention of juvenile delinquency, instead of punishment and treatment. Other strategies, which incorporate components of PYD, include academic skills enhancement; after school enrichment; mentoring; reentry court and truancy prevention.<sup>24</sup>
  - **Develop a coordinated system-level approach to addressing mental health issues among school-aged youth that bridges education, mental health, and substance abuse policies and practices (1)**  
Schools, families and available mental health and substance abuse providers in the community need to work together to develop a

coordinated approach that addresses the needs and values of the school community. As part of this effort, it’s important to build capacity to recognize a problem, know what assistance is needed, how serious the need is, where the student and family should go for services, and ensure that services are coordinated and integrated in developing plans.<sup>25</sup> Mental health services often spark debate in communities, especially the role of schools. Bringing stakeholders to the table—including students and families—is the only way to ensure success.

Promising programs, such as the Communities That Care prevention-planning system focus on this public health approach that includes a community-wide strategy. Communities that Care also incorporates a broad focus focuses on positive development to prevent substance use, delinquency, teen pregnancy, school dropout and violence—targeting the many inter-related problems students can face.

- **Change foster care policies and practices to ease transitions and support academic success (1,3)**  
Youth in foster care struggle with many challenges that cross system boundaries, including education, mental health, and juvenile justice. Change in policy and practice that bridge federal, state and local levels are important:
  - Designate an educational liaison for each child to serve as an advocate who also coordinates with the child welfare liaison.
  - Increase interagency collaboration and sharing of education information across coordinating agencies.
  - Decrease placement transfers for children in foster care.
  - Provide training for foster care providers to decrease the need for transfers.

- Develop policies that allow for a student to remain in his/her home school regardless of a move to a new foster home.
- Provide transportation options and funding for students to remain in his/her home school.
- Provide access to academic resources, including tutoring and enrichment activities.
- Ensure assessment and access to mental health, substance abuse and physical or mental abuse treatment services.
- Ensure special needs are assessed and appropriate IEPs are assigned.
- Ensure that ELL (English Language Learner) students are given access to services.
- Ensure that agencies and individuals are held accountable for academic outcomes.
- Provide basic training to school staff on the unique needs of children in foster care.<sup>26</sup>

• **Improve the quality, coordination, and distribution of the system of programs serving youth (1)**

To ensure that youth-serving systems provide services in areas where there is a prevalence of dropouts and that students and families are effectively supported in addressing obstacles to graduation, partners should create a landscape map and institute a quality improvement system. Landscape mapping entails engaging with youth and their families, providers, and

decision-makers to gather common information about the system of formal and informal supports for youth. Information could include the age of those served, the broad program delivery approaches used, intended outcomes aimed at, specific supports and services provided and the resources the respondent believes would help improve services. Graphic representation of the data is important for ease of communication.<sup>27</sup>

An intermediary or organization dedicated to system-wide capacity building should establish quality improvement systems building on landscape map data. A systemic approach takes the onus off of individual organizations, builds common language across the field, and engages a broad range of providers in intentional continuous improvement.<sup>28</sup> Common elements of such systems include:

- Internal program assessment using a reliable, valid observation tool;
- External program assessment using a reliable, valid observation tool;
- Program improvement plans that are based on the above data;
- Individualized quality coaching or advising with programs based on their plans; and
- Training opportunities that align with assessment results.

## Approaches by High-level Strategy

This chart outlines each of the research-vetted approaches discussed in the Mobilization Blueprint. As you can see, many of these approaches cut across more than one of the high-level strategies that are essential for an effective mobilization effort.

### High-Level Strategies

Approaches	Identify and address obstacles to graduation	Engage students for school success	Support families to improve academic achievement	Understanding and leveraging youth-serving systems
Establish early warning systems for youths at risk of dropping out	✓			✓
Address issues students face	✓	✓	✓	✓
Evaluate the need for alternative programs that address the individual social needs and academic requirements of students at risk of dropping out	✓	✓	✓	✓
Create a school climate that does not tolerate bullying, violence or crime	✓			
Increase opportunities for mentoring relationships		✓		✓
Provide tutoring to address specific academic issues		✓		
Provide an enriching, safe, and supportive environment to students during out-of-school time		✓	✓	✓
Engage students by responding to their diverse learning styles and involving them in the learning process		✓		
Connect meaningful community service experiences with academic learning		✓		✓
Create a culture in schools in which educators are empowered to seek, share, and act on their learning in order to improve their practice.	✓	✓		
Help students see the relevance of a good education for their futures		✓	✓	✓
Engage parents and caregivers as true, active partners in their children's education			✓	
Connect families with the assistance they need to best support their children's school success	✓		✓	✓
Establish school-linked services and supports	✓			✓
Promote juvenile justice system policies and practices that prevent delinquency and crime and help students stay in school	✓			✓
Develop a coordinated system-level approach to addressing mental health issues among school-aged youth that bridges education, mental health and substance abuse policies and practices.	✓			✓
Change foster care policies and practices to ease transitions and support academic success.	✓		✓	✓
Improve the quality, coordination, and distribution of the system of programs serving youth	✓			✓

## Notes and References

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## IV. THE SITUATION IN OUR COMMUNITY

### What will go in your Mobilization Plan?

This section presents a summary (4 to 6 pages) of local data and information. It can be divided into three sections: data, community resources and findings from community engagement.

#### A. Data

This section presents existing data that your community partnership obtains from various sources—school system, mental health system, court system, juvenile justice system, etc. –describing the scope and dimensions of the graduation/dropout issue in your community – rates, trends, who’s most affected, why and when they disconnect, system and community contributors to the problem, etc.

#### What’s here now?

- Examples of data presented as bullet points
- An example of data presented as a narrative
- Examples of data presented as charts
- An example of data presented as a combination of charts and narrative

#### What’s the guidance for creating this section?

The national data provided in Section II of your local Mobilization Plan Blueprint serves as a starting point for your local investigations. Guidance on compiling, displaying, and making sense of local data is offered in Task II of the Planning Guide.

#### B. Community Resources

This section reports on the resources currently being applied to various aspects of the graduation issue in your community. It is not simply an inventory of existing programs. It summarizes the community partnership’s work to:

- Map and assess the distribution and characteristics of relevant programs and services in relation to the locations and attributes of targeted local populations

- Analyze the scope and likely effectiveness of current initiatives to address underlying issues related to policies, practices, coordination, messages, and other problematic aspects of various systems and organizations

Depending on the specific approaches your partnership has selected for implementing its selected strategies and the level of detail you use to describe them in Section VI, this section also may name community-based assets available to assist with implementation.

### **What's here now?**

- An example of narrative description of mapping community resources
- An example of a graphic resource map

### **What's the guidance for creating this section?**

Your analysis of the scope and dimensions of the issue in your community provides the starting point for identifying and assessing relevant community resources.

## **C. Findings from Community Engagement**

This section summarizes what the community partnership has learned through authentic engagement with relevant segments of the community about:

- The scope and dimensions of the graduation/dropout issue locally
- The strengths and weaknesses of local resources and efforts intended to address the issue, and community-based resources available to assist in strategy implementation

### **What's here now?**

- An example of summarizing community engagement findings

### **What's the guidance for creating this section?**

The work of engaging with various segments of the community around the challenge of increasing the graduation rate begins as the United Way is deciding whether to become involved in the issue and is ongoing during the planning and implementation process.

The following section is a starting point.

## A. Data

Local data can be presented as bullet points, charts, graphs, and maps or described in narrative form as shown in the examples below.

### Bullet points which help to describe the problem

*(From United Way of Lehigh Valley, Bethlehem, PA)*

The severity of the problem:

- 21.7% of the students who entered 9th grade in Pennsylvania in 2000-01 failed to graduate in 2003-04, more than one in 5 students *(Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children)*.
- Over 1,000 students have been dropping out of school in the Lehigh Valley for at least the last 5 years, with 1,093 doing so in 2003-04.

Clear indications for targeting investments/interventions:

- 76% of the 1,093 Lehigh Valley dropouts in 2003-04 or 832 students were from the Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton School Districts, up from a total of 447 dropouts in 1997-98.

- On the average, students who dropped out in these three urban districts in 2003-05 were as follows:

- 23% students dropped out in 9th grade, 26% in 10th grade, 28% in 11th grade, and 23% in 12th grade.
- 58% of students who dropped out were male and 42% were female.
- 55% of students who dropped out were Hispanic, 29% white, and 16% black.
- 50% of students who dropped out were economically disadvantaged (2004-05 only).

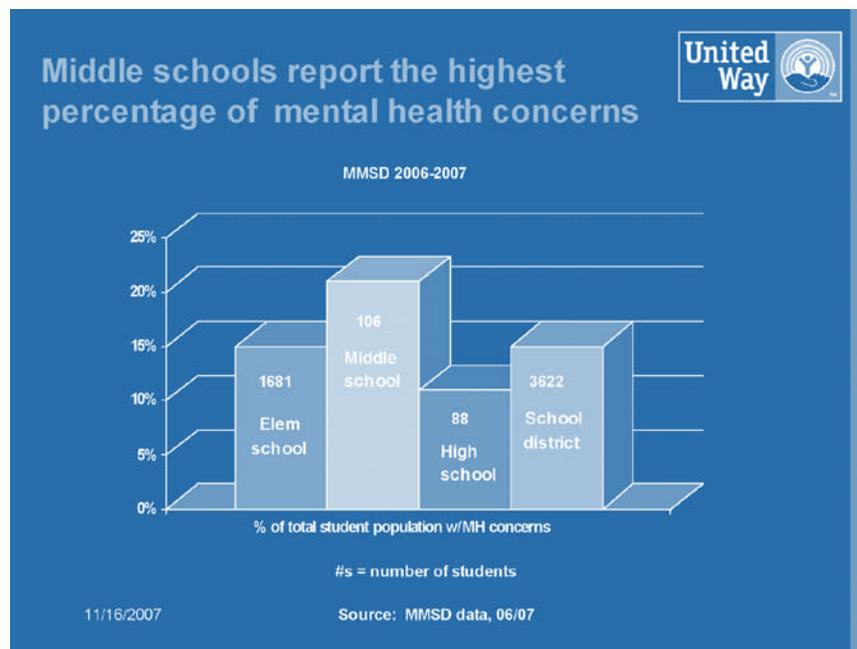
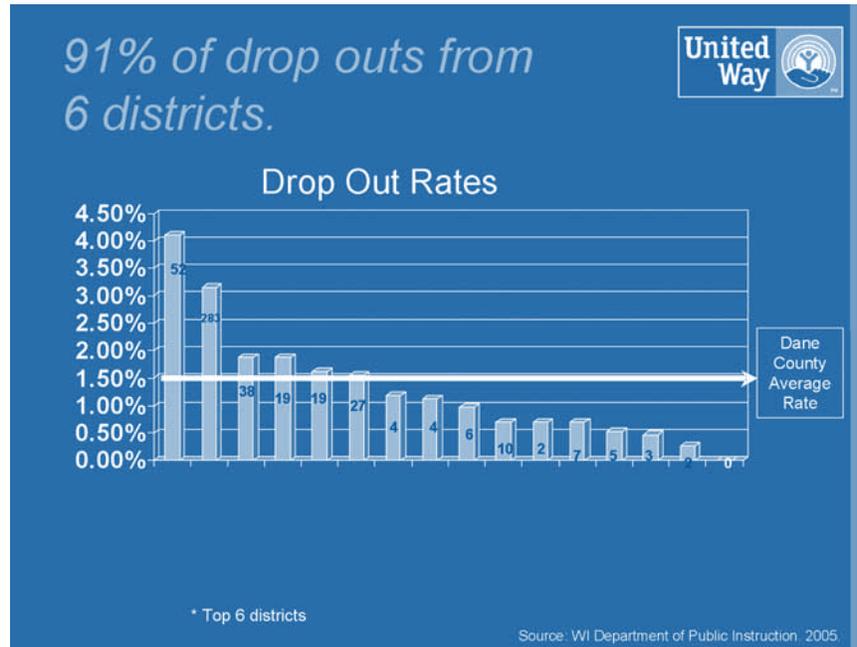
### Narrative Presentation of Local Data

*(From United Way of Lehigh Valley, Bethlehem, PA)*

Dropout rates for the 17 school districts in the Lehigh Valley ranged from almost 7% in Allentown to less than 1% in eight districts in 2003-04. It is extremely important to note that the PA Department of Education uses total school district enrollment of 7th – 12th graders as the denominator for determining the dropout rate vs. the smaller 9th-12th grade denominator base. For this reason, one cannot compare PA dropout rates (which appear lower and more positive) to national dropout rates. Therefore, while we can certainly map trend lines within districts over the years, a more telling fact about “youth succeeding in school” is the actual number of students dropping out each year. In the Lehigh Valley, that number has been around 1000 for the last three data-available years (2002-04), with 76% of those dropouts doing so in the three urban districts.

## Local Data Presented as a Chart

(From United Way of Dane County, Madison, WI)



## Local Data Presented as a Combination of Charts and Narrative

(From United Way of Dane County, Madison, WI)

### 1. Safety

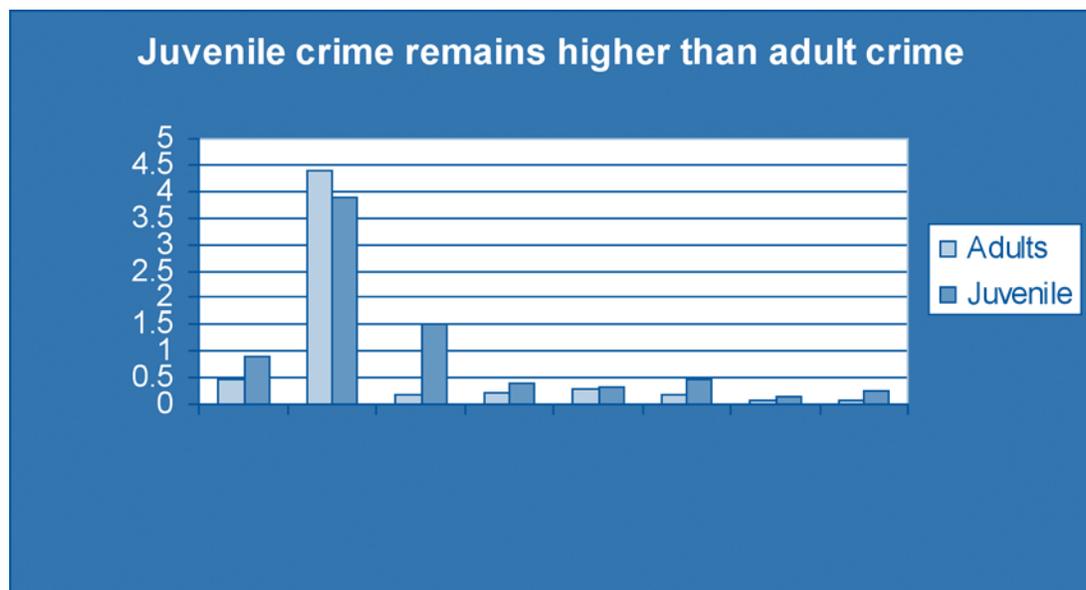
Youth violence is considered a national public health problem according to the US Surgeon General, National Institutes of Health, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Family Physicians, USDHHS Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and Rand among others.

Youth crime in Dane County is increasing at a rate that is almost double that of adults. We have defined violence broadly, from less serious acts such as misbehaving, acting out, and self-harm—including aggressive behaviors such as verbal abuse, bullying, hitting, slapping, or fist fighting—to more serious acts such as aggravated assault, robbery, rape, and homicide. Our youth have also demonstrated such silent behaviors as drinking and drug use, becoming disengaged, and dropping out of school.

Included in this increase in youth violence is an increase in violent crimes among females. Female crimes of aggression have increased by 53% over the past 10 years. Property damage, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest offenses have increased over the past years; while drug crimes among our youth have seen a decrease. Dane County has over 500 youth in the justice system with African Americans represented at a higher rate than their counterparts. Youth are most likely to become involved in the justice system between the ages of 13 and 17.

Youth heavily involved in juvenile justice miss critical opportunities to prepare for post-secondary education, develop professional skills, and take advantage of employment opportunities. Truant youth have been found to be involved in criminal acts such as burglary, auto theft, and vandalism. Therefore, communities with high rates of truancy are likely to have correspondingly high rates of daytime criminal activity.

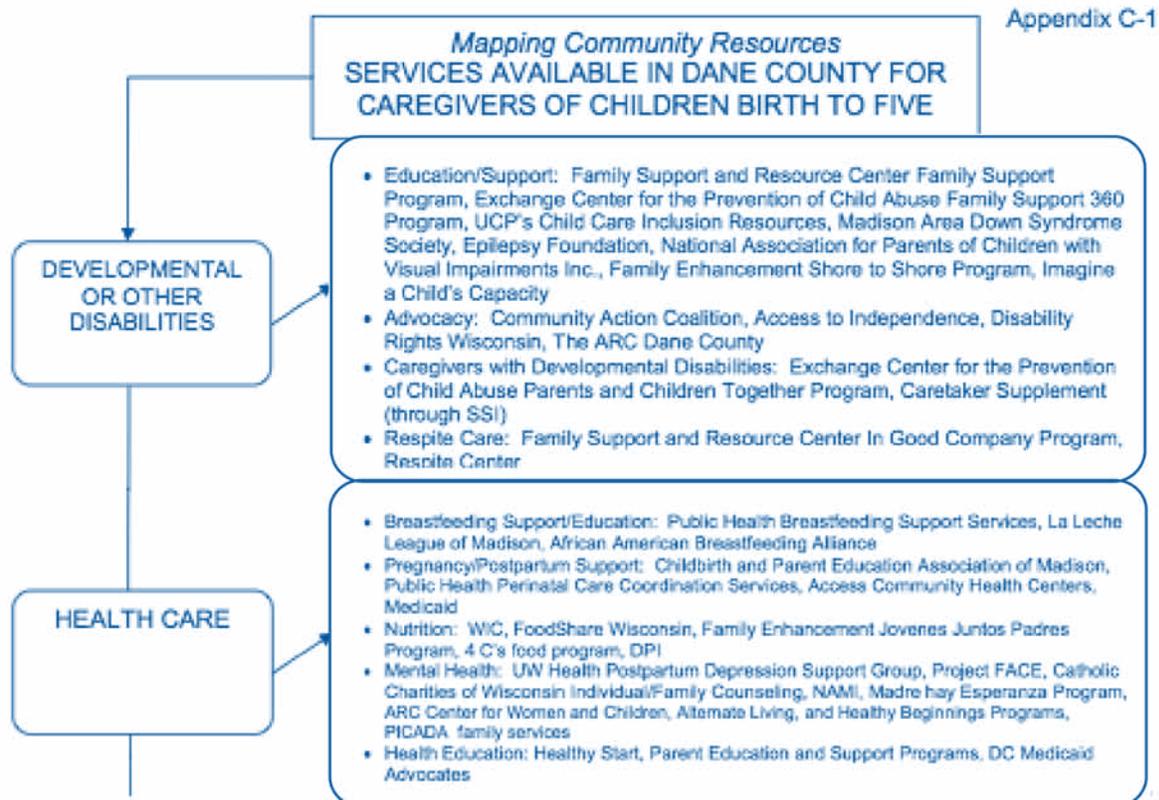
Juvenile offenders who graduate from high school have lower levels of literacy and math skills making it difficult to compete in an already tight employment market.



## B. Community Resources

(From United Way of Dane County, Madison, WI)

Research has shown that both physical health and well-being and early care and education experiences impact children’s readiness for school. Therefore, it is critical that all children have access to high quality, affordable services in the community. Appendix C1 highlights a preliminary list of Dane County programs and services available to children ages 0-5 and their families. Capacity and cultural competency are issues that need to be addressed so that all families that need services are able to access them.



## C. Findings from Community Engagement

*(From United Way of Dane County, Madison, WI)*

### **Our Major Findings From Our Six Community Engagements (with 200 + participants) throughout Dane County.**

Parents Top 6 Wishes for Their Youth in High School:

- Academic Success and Job/Career
- Self-Esteem & State of Mind
- Positive Friends/Stay out of Trouble/Be Socially Responsible
- Safety/Feel Safe
- Family Stability
- Productive Members of Society

Youth Goals, Hopes and Dreams

- Job: finding, interviewing practice and assistance with resumes
- Scholarships to post-secondary education
- Social Activities
- Respect, support/help, trust and understanding from adults
- Early career exploration/job options

Research tells us that high maternal expectations for educational achievement are directly associated with higher student math and reading scores. When adolescents perceive that their parents have high educational goals, they have more interest in school, greater academic self-regulation and higher goal pursuits. There is evidence that African American parents' expectations have an even greater effect on 8th and 9th grade math when parents also communicate to their young adolescents that academic success is defined by effort, rather than by a desire to outperform others.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Notes and References**

<sup>1</sup> Harvard Family Research Project No. 3 Spring 2007



## V. HYPOTHESIS AND GOAL

### What will go in your Mobilization Plan?

This brief section presents the community partnership’s hypothesis or “theory of change” for increasing graduation rates, as well as the graduation/dropout goal it has established. The theory of change comprises the high-level strategies the partnership will pursue to address the biggest local obstacles to graduation.

### What’s here now?

- Examples of local graduation/dropout goals
- A sample hypothesis
- Summaries of high-level strategies that the NPC Mobilization Plan Task Force has identified as needed to address the graduation issue were presented in “Section III: National Research on Strategies that Work”

### What’s the guidance for creating this section?

You will include the statement of high-level strategies from the Template for your local Mobilization Plan.

The following section is a starting point.

### Sample hypothesis:

By identifying and addressing challenges to graduation faced by students, increasing student engagement in school and community, supporting parents and families, and by leveraging and connecting systems that serve youth we will increase the on-time graduation rate for young people. By doing this we will also help secure the economic future of our youth as well as the region. *(From United Way of Dane County, Madison, WI)*

### Sample goals:

- To increase graduation rate in Dane County to 96% by 2012. This reduces the non-graduation rate by 50% in Dane County.

*(From United Way of Dane County, Madison, WI)*

- All Lehigh Valley youth will succeed in school and graduate from high school ready for work or continued education, and ready for life.

*(From United Way of Lehigh Valley, Bethlehem, PA)*

- More students in middle and high school remain engaged in their education from 6th grade through graduation and more parents support their students' efforts to complete high school.

*(From United Way of Northeast Florida, Jacksonville, FL)*

- To have a positive effect on the number of youth who attain a high school education and are ready to enter post-secondary education, participate in employment training, and/or join the paid workforce. By including the entire county we will build a strong collaboration that does not begin and end with public school district borders and will identify and create pathways for all adolescents who are struggling with traditional methods of education.

*(From Greater Kalamazoo United Way, Kalamazoo, MI)*

## VI. LOCAL STRATEGIES

### What will go in your Mobilization Plan?

This section describes the specific approaches your community partnership has selected to implement the high-level strategies and address the major local obstacles to graduation. These may include approaches to addressing obstacles rooted in policies, practices, coordination, and other problematic aspects of various systems and organizations as well as efforts to expand, re-focus, coordinate, improve, supplement, etc. relevant services for youth and families.

### What's here now?

- An example of various approaches to a single strategy
- Specific approaches to implementing high-level strategies that research has shown are effective were presented in “Section III: National Research on Strategies that Work”

### What's the guidance for creating this section?

The NPC Mobilization Plan Task Force has identified the high-level strategies needed to address the graduation issue. Armed with your knowledge of the scope and dimensions of the graduation/drop-out issue locally, your assessment of the resources/assets currently being applied to various aspects of the issue in your community, and the perspectives of relevant segments of the community, your community partnership will identify the major local obstacles to graduation. Based on this, it will decide how to implement the strategies by selecting specific strategy-supporting approaches that address the identified obstacles.

The following section is a starting point.

## Increase Student Engagement

*(From United Way of Dane County, Madison, WI)*

We will increase student engagement in two different aspects: through a community-based response and education-based response.

### Community-Based Strategies

#### *Trained Community Volunteers*

Through the community-based student engagement, we plan to play off of the Schools of Hope approach of utilizing trained community volunteers to work with students and teachers but this time as “Graduation Mentors”. These graduation mentors will work closely with the youth, their parents and teachers to keep each student on a successful path to graduation. Graduation mentors will begin to work with youth as they transition from elementary school into middle school and continue working with them until they graduate from high school and will be assigned to youth showing signs of truancy.

We learned through our community engagement meetings with youth at both Wright Middle School and Warner Park that they need and want to have an adult in their life that they can trust and that will be there with them through graduation. The Graduation mentors will be an adult that they can trust and help guide them through the transitions in grade levels.

The Graduation Mentors will also help the youth understand how the classes that they are taking will relate and be helpful in their future career and employment opportunities. For instance, helping youth understand that algebra helps to develop your critical thinking skills which will be important to help them think through situations and problems that will arise both in life and on the job. Algebra will help develop the skill of thinking problems through to come out with the best solution. Employers will look for team players and people that can get along well with the other employees. Graduation mentors will also have an opportunity to help the student see the real world connection. Like how fractions are used in food services, construction and machine tooling.

Research tells us that the earlier youth begin career exploration, the better. Graduation mentors will also assist in this early career exploration.

#### *Youth Volunteering as a Pre-Employment Strategy*

Volunteering can help youth build social skills, problem solving skills and leadership skills. All of these skills will help make youth more marketable to both employers but also schools. This strategy will help reduce truancy and increase academic success by encouraging students to use volunteer experiences on their early resumes to increase their ability to find employment.

### *After School/Summer Programs and Tutoring*

We know that after school between the hours of 3 and 8 p.m. as well as summertime are high risk times for youth to engage in risky behaviors and crime since these are times when there are the least amount of youth involved in structured activities. Research shows us that youth who are actively engaged in activities have less time on their hands to get involved in risky behaviors which will reduce crime rates and referrals to the District Attorney's Office, and truancy leading to increased graduation. After-school and summer programming outcomes will be asked to align their outcomes to school attendance, academic achievement and graduation.

### *Small Learning Communities*

Research tells us that smaller class sizes allow a better teacher/child ratio for more personal attention and increased engagement with our youth. However, this is not always possible. Each pilot community will be encouraged to review their teacher/child ratio for areas of improvement. After-school programming can also provide small learning communities in their homework support. And, our Educator Cohort Training will also show teachers ways they can create small learning communities within their classrooms.

### *Schools of Hope Elementary and Middle School*

The current work being done with the successful Schools of Hope tutoring initiative will be expanded and enhanced in each community that adapts the Delegation on Disconnected and Violent Youth strategies. Tutors will continue to work in concert with the classroom teachers to mentor students in reading and math skills.

### *Peer Court*

Expanding on the Youth Peer Court model, we will continue providing opportunities for youth to learn about consequences and leadership skills by helping to determine consequences for their peers who have committed crimes. This model has been proven to reduce recidivism in youth, particularly for first-time offenders, and reduction in referrals to the District Attorney's office.



## VII. ACTIVITIES AND TIMEFRAME

### **What will go in your Mobilization Plan?**

This section summarizes the major activities/milestones for implementing the various components of the mobilization plan, including deadlines for reaching each milestone.

### **What's here now?**

- A sample timeframe from a local mobilization effort

### **What's the guidance for creating this section?**

Writing the summary for this section is easy; it's preparing the detailed implementation plan on which the summary is based that's challenging.

The following section is a starting point.

## Timeline for Delegation on Disconnected and Violent Youth

*(From United Way of Dane County, Madison, WI)*

Our work plan for implementing these strategies within the 6 communities that make up 91% of the drop out rate in Dane County are outlined below. Our goal is to reduce the non-graduation rate in each community by 50%.

We will begin working with two communities to pilot the DDVY strategies in early 2008. Oregon has already indicated interest in being a pilot community. A second sight will be determined by January 2008.

Time Frame	Work To Be Completed
October 2007	Meet with pilot community Administrative Team
November	Meet with 1st pilot community Board of Director Meet with 2nd pilot community Administrative Team
December	Stakeholder meetings throughout Dane County
January 2008	DDVY Public Report Launch
February	1st Pilot Community – Community Leadership Meeting
March	2nd Pilot Community – Community Leadership Meeting
June	Review year 1 of strategy implementation
September	Pilot Communities Implement Strategies
December	Begin working with 3rd community (Madison?)
June 2009	Review year 2
September 2009	3rd Pilot Begins
September 2010	Pilot in one additional community
September 2011	Pilot in last two communities
June 2012	Review of goal: to increase graduation rate in Dane County to 95% and reduce the non-graduation rate by 50% in Dane County.

# APPENDICES

## What will go in your Mobilization Plan?

This section can include a variety of material, including data or research that is too long to include in the plan itself, or a more detailed exploration of a particular issue in your community. You may also want to include an “Acknowledgements” section that recognizes those who have been involved in your partnership, as well as those that have provided resources to support your work.

# Acknowledgements

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## **Praise For the Mobilization Plan Blueprint For Increasing High School Graduation Rates**

**“I thought the data clearly indicated that we must do something. Because every school district has a different culture I strongly support in every way possible each local United Way to work collaboratively with their respective districts—that way the research and the strategies would be specifically tailored to the local population.”**

Romain Dallemand, Ed.D.  
Superintendent  
Rochester Public Schools  
Rochester, Minnesota

**“The Blueprint clearly outlines the high school dropout crisis, and makes a convincing case for a well-reasoned set of strategies and approaches for increasing the graduation rate.”**

John Wilcox  
Deputy Director  
Corporate Voices for Working Families

**“I am very excited about this resource. It is needed and is a great way to start conversations within communities.”**

Hardin.L.K. Coleman, Ph.D.  
Dean and Professor, School of Education  
Boston University

