



## **JOBS FOR THE FUTURE**

CREATING STRATEGIES  
for Educational and Economic Opportunity

# **Balancing High School Reform: Reaching High Standards and High Graduation Rates**

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**Draft of Key Elements** of district reform directed at improving outcomes and options for young people who are not on track to a high school graduation.

### **Visible and coherent dual agenda: high standards and high graduation/low dropout rates**

- High school reform plan has an explicit focus on the dual agenda of raising standards and graduation rates and includes specific strategies for improving graduation rates and decreasing dropouts
- Superintendent and other district leaders convey the commitment to a dual agenda through clear and consistent messaging to central office and school level staff and the broader public
- High-level district staff are responsible for developing and supporting implementation of strategies for improving graduation and reducing dropouts
- Leaders of district offices/departments with critical roles in implementing a dual agenda (e.g., high school reform, alternative education, special education, assessment) work closely together on all aspects of the reform agenda

### **Smart use of data to guide reform and move a dual agenda**

- Data systems allow a fine-grained, segmented analysis of students who are off-track for graduation, including research-based early indicators of dropping out
- District leaders makes such an analysis a high priority for data management staff
- Data is updated periodically and made available to district leaders responsible for dual agenda to use to adjust and refine interventions as needed
- School/program level data is easily accessible by practitioners leading the effort on-the-ground

### **Explicit focus on race/income**

- District leaders deliberately and consistently take into consideration class and race in any analysis of young people who are off track for graduation
- District reform includes clear and explicit strategies for closing the “Graduation Gap,” linking improved graduation rates to broader agenda of closing the achievement gap
- Community leaders with direct ties to neighborhoods/families with high proportions of off-track youth inform strategies and help build support for programmatic and policy changes as core partners in district efforts to address youth being left behind

**Coherent set of reform strategies and pathways that address dropout prevention and recovery**

- Based on analysis of data on off-track students, district implements research-based strategies, models, and interventions specifically designed to reconnect students and accelerate their progress (e.g., credit recovery and accelerated literacy and numeracy strategies)
- Quality education options are available to off-track students and out-of-school youth, with sufficient support services to keep them on pathways to high school diploma and postsecondary credential
- District has in place a process to guard against tracking and creation of second-class, second-chance options
- Process for financing schools and programs recognizes the compelling needs of students who are behind and not on track to a high school diploma

**Balance of accountability and flexibility**

- Schools serving dropouts and other youth not on track to graduation are accountable for these youth graduating from a program of study that prepares them for postsecondary education or training
- Schools serving dropouts and other youth not on track to high school graduation have core autonomies (e.g., scheduling, hiring, curriculum) to allow for most effective organization/customization of the educational program to attract, hold onto, and graduate these youth
- District accountability system reports graduation/dropout rates and other key indicators separately for young people who have had significant interruptions in their schooling/credits so that schools are not penalized for serving these youth
- Accountability system includes “value-added” assessments to acknowledge/reward academic progress of young people who begin far behind and are not yet achieving to the standards measured by high-stakes exams

**Strategic collaboration to provide essential supports and services**

- District and schools partner with community, municipal, and public care agencies to target resources for young people who require the most intensive and comprehensive services to get back on track to graduation (i.e., those furthest behind and/or with life circumstances that seriously impede learning)
- Partners act in concert to develop programming for the young people they share in common (e.g., youth in juvenile justice system, foster care, social services)
- Partnerships result in the braiding of funding streams to make it fiscally manageable to provide the level of services needed
- Partners work to change policies that hinder collaboration across systems

***Institutional responsibility for successful transitions of off-track/out-of-school along the educational pipeline***

- District has a dedicated department, unit, or office whose primary responsibility is reaching out to and reenrolling dropouts into appropriate educational settings
- Reenrollment strategy includes transparent set of options/pathways that includes descriptions of who the options are designed for and what they offer students
- District offers multiple points of entry for returning dropouts including central office, Web-site, and community-based outreach
- Specific procedures are in place to ensure smooth transitions from other systems back into education