

POLICY FORUM PROCEEDINGS

Alternative Accountability Policy Forum / 2014



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Conference proceedings developed by
BethAnn Berliner and Lori Van Houten of WestEd



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RAPSA also thanks WestEd, which shares our commitment to ensuring that all students, whatever their circumstances, succeed in our schools and that all learners — from infants to adults — thrive in our communities. We are fortunate to have had WestEd staff members BethAnn Berliner and Lori Van Houten attend and document the 2014 forum in these proceedings.



Linda Dawson, EdD

*President, Reaching At-Promise Students Association
Superintendent/Chief Education Officer, SIATech*

Foreword



I am honored to have participated in the 2014 Alternative Accountability Policy Forum, an event filled with real heroes who have the courage and heart to educate our students with the greatest challenges: the nation's "at-promise" students, those who have experienced violence, family dysfunction, bullying, depression, learning struggles, addiction, and poverty, and who have dropped out or been pushed out of our public schools before graduating.

When we make education the number one priority of every state — as the constitutions of California, Minnesota, and Washington explicitly state that it should be — we can give these students a reason to return to school. We can show them that we care, that we believe in their learning potential, that we can build safety nets for them, and that they can develop skills for the workplace. But to do that, we need our schools to be incubators of human potential — to nurture our students to develop their unique gifts.

What follows is a summary of the 21 sessions at the policy forum. The materials, which can be found at www.alternativeaccountabilityforum.org, show how much we have learned about educating at-promise students and how far we have to go if all students are to earn a diploma and have a chance at a meaningful career. It truly takes a village to reengage dropouts.

Together we can make a difference. Research is unequivocal: The power of one caring adult can change a child's life, but the power of more than one — of two or several or many — is much more than additive, it is exponential.

You hold the key. I know those of you at the policy forum will go forward with energy and focus.

Over my years of working in and visiting schools, I have had an awakening — an understanding of the power of a child's dream. We often say we see hope in the eyes of a child. I now realize that what we see is optimism in their eyes. There is a difference. We hope with our fingers crossed. Optimism is the whole hand waving from the back of a classroom. Optimism is running to the library. Optimism is trying again and again in the language lab, the robotics lab, or the culinary class. Optimism is the homeless girl I met wading in the tide pools dreaming of being a marine biologist. Each of you who participated in the policy forum works with her counterpart. America needs more than hope; it also needs a good case of optimism. You catch it from our students and from the resilience of at-promise youth. Like those who participate in RAPSA events, I am a "carrier."

Delaine Eastin

California Superintendent of Public Instruction (1995-2003)

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Introduction

It is an ambitious goal: to develop and put into action alternative accountability policies and education practices for students who are considered to be at risk of dropping out of high school. These are students who are over-age and under-credited for their grade; have dropped out or returned to school for another chance to earn a diploma; and/or face homelessness, family abuse, incarceration, gang involvement, or other personal circumstances that make regular attendance and academic learning extremely difficult.

It is urgent to act now. The longer conventional accountability measures are used to describe the performance of these students and the alternative schools that serve them, the steeper the climb for 16-24 year olds to become students “at promise” of school success and for their schools to be judged by the strides they make rather than by the performance targets they miss.

While there is growing research and practical knowledge about serving at-promise students and building alternative accountability approaches, the challenges in implementing these policies and practices are considerable.

To address these challenges, on November 14-15, 2014, the School for Integrated Academics and Technologies (SIATech) and the Reaching At-Promise Students Association (RAPSA) convened over 150 education and policy leaders from across the nation at the Third Annual Alternative Accountability Policy Forum in Coronado, California. In 21 interactive sessions — on instructional strategies, alternative accountability metrics and measures, data use, and community partnerships, each focused on supporting at-promise students — over 50 presenters shared research, described promising practices, and advocated for policy changes.

“Edsam”

The policy forum opened with a keynote presentation entitled “Education System Accountability Measures for Equity and Excellence” by Thomas Saenz, the current president of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund and a career civil rights attorney. Observing that the policy forum coincided with the 50-year



anniversary of the *Civil Rights Act*, the *Voting Rights Act*, the *Immigration Act*, and the 60-year anniversary of the *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court decision, Saenz argued that education equity is the civil rights issue of our time. He believes that the nation's top education priority should be building a new accountability system that better serves both academic excellence, which he contends is moving in the right direction, and equity, which continues to fall short of our nation's moral imperative and legal obligations to educate all students, especially African American and Latino students, and students who live in poor communities. If we fail to educate them, he says, nothing short of our nation's success is in peril.

To illustrate his point about "the abandonment of equity," Saenz describes at-risk students in the current accountability system as "edsam." He coined this term, a reference to flotsam and jetsam, the accidental or intentional discarding of objects, to show that these students and the schools that they attend are metaphorically tossed overboard, held accountable to traditional metrics and measures that do not fully account for the differences in their circumstances and contexts. The lack of appropriate and accurate accountability suggests that these students do not matter to us as a nation.

Saenz called for the policy forum participants to demonstrate their commitment to at-promise students and make this important change by becoming "an informed and determined voice for change."

Call to Action

At the policy forum, participants were resolute that now, more than ever, the education of at-promise students needs focused attention at the national, state, and local levels. As a group, they called for a rethinking of policies, practices, and partnerships for building instructional and alternative accountability approaches that support excellence and equity in schooling as well as account for the difficult circumstances of many alternative students. What follows is a summary of the key points as presented in each session, along with policy and practice recommendations from the 2014 forum.



Voices from the Field

TAKEAWAYS FROM 21 SESSIONS

A Conversation About Anecdotes and Data

BOB RATH AND NELSON SMITH

This interactive session examined the challenge of credibly identifying “success” in alternative schools. What to measure and how to measure it is a complex and divisive issue, especially when high-stakes decisions are involved, such as whether to award a high school diploma or reauthorize a school’s charter. Rath coordinated development of a report by the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools that profiled five schools that have successfully reengaged dropouts. Smith led a project that produced a report for the National Alliance of Charter School Authorizers arguing that anecdotes alone are not sufficient to demonstrate that alternative schools or their students are successful. Both presenters agreed that conventional accountability approaches fall short of representing how well alternative schools serve over-age and under-credited students and that other approaches may be more appropriate and informative.

In general, students who attend alternative schools do not perform at the same level as students who attend traditional schools and are on track to graduate. Because students attending alternative schools usually have a history of academic failure, interruptions in schooling, and/or dropping out, alternative schools often have different seat time, course completion, discipline, and graduation requirements to re-engage them in school. Yet alternative students are evaluated within the same accountability system as traditional students, and based on conventional metrics and measures — such as proficiency rates on standardized tests, daily attendance rates, and four-year cohort dropout and graduation rates — alternative students and schools typically compare poorly to traditional students and schools.

The presenters argued these rates and comparisons do not accurately convey how well alternative students and schools are performing.

They made a case for effective “storytelling” as a key component of accountability reporting, blending the in-depth, contextualized insights of anecdotal data with the more precise growth and point-in-time measures of quantitative data. They argued, “Stories without numbers and numbers without stories don’t get the message across.” All school accountability systems, particularly those for alternative schools, need both.

Forum participants acknowledged the inherent challenge of conveying anecdotes in ways that add value to the measurement of student and school progress and can serve as meaningful metrics for educators, policymakers, and the general public. Forum participants recommended that alternative schools produce a year-end report that tells stories of student progress and outcomes using both quantitative and qualitative data from measures that can be evaluated over time.

Accreditation for Schools Serving At-Promise Youth

DON HAUGHT, GINGER HOVENIC, AND DAVID HURST

This session was led by experts from two of the nation's major accreditation organizations, AdvancED and Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Hovenic and Hurst described how alternative schools could strengthen how they portray their effectiveness in the accreditation process. They emphasized that accreditation is not merely a matter of compliance, but also a tool for reflection and improvement and that it should be thought of as a way of demonstrating commitment to a school's mission.

The presenters recommended using multiple measures — from the boardroom to the classroom — to demonstrate a school's effectiveness. Alternative schools should consider adding some nontraditional but quantifiable metrics that are relevant to the local context, measuring concepts such as resiliency, student engagement, and social justice — all of which are important to and reflect a school's mission. Meaningful anecdotes and post-graduation success measures were also recommended as ways to illustrate a school's story of success. The presenters advised that, for accreditation, it is more important to have several clear metrics that accurately tell a school's story rather than a binder full of conventional compliance data.

Forum participants heard the message that it is important to clearly define school expectations and the metrics being used at the outset of the accreditation process to ensure that there is a shared vision of success across the school community. The power of the accreditation process is that it gives alternative schools leverage to have the oftentimes difficult internal and communitywide conversations about whether goals are being met and what might be needed to strengthen school outcomes — all of which can lead to opportunities for change based on metrics that matter to each school.



Alternative Accountability Policy: The Action Is at the State Level

JENNY CURTIN, JESSICA KNEVALS, NICK MATHERN, AND NICOLE YOHALEM

This presentation made the case that influencing state government is critical for making alternative accountability policy change, because it is typically the largest source of local education funding and has the authority to direct its uses. It is the highest level of responsive public policy, with state agencies taking into account both statewide and local perspectives. Three states shared examples of state policy changes that strengthened alternative accountability for reengaged dropouts.

In Washington, the state adopted legislation to create a dropout recovery system that provides education and services for out of school youth ages 16-21 who are unlikely to graduate from high school by age 21. It includes a provision requiring that per-pupil funds follow recovered students as they move through K-12 schools and community based service organizations and transition into community college. Other alternative accountability provisions in Washington included modifying traditional seat-time and count-day requirements, assessing student performance using multiple measures of growth, and only reporting student proficiency scores on state exams and graduation rates to the state, rather than reporting these rates at the district level. This last change addresses a concern that district-level reporting can result in disincentives for reenrolling students with histories of dropping out.

Policymakers in Massachusetts intentionally avoided building a separate accountability system for different types of students and schools; instead, they focused on creating fair and appropriate adjustments within the statewide system. Policy changes included requiring all schools to meet either four- or five-year graduation rate criteria, to report an annual dropout rate, and to report an annual dropout reengagement rate. New legislation also allows alternative schools to use different cut points for reporting proficiency on state standardized exams. High schools can also earn extra accountability points toward the state's Progress and

Performance Index by enrolling two or more reengaged dropouts. This yearly index combines achievement, growth, and both dropout and graduation rates. These kinds of accountability incentives validate that educating dropouts is challenging work, sends a clear message that reengaged dropouts are valued members of a school community, and provides data in addition to the dropout and graduation numbers used in the state's accountability calculations.

In Colorado, recent legislation has redefined the state's vision of alternative schools to include over-age and under-credited students and other at-risk students who struggle to earn a diploma, instead of targeting primarily students with social and behavioral challenges. With this shift, alternative schools are no longer exempt from the state's accountability system. But key adjustments have been made within that system for reporting on alternative students. Among the changes have been the inclusion of optional performance measures (e.g., reporting the highest rates from four-, five-, six-, or seven-year dropout and graduation rates), along with using differentiated cut points on standardized exams and other performance growth and student engagement measures.

Taken together, these efforts demonstrate how new legislation can strengthen existing state accountability systems in ways that encourage schools to recover dropouts and can support local efforts to measure meaningful academic progress.

Alternative Schools in Massachusetts

BETH ANDERSON AND NINA CULBERTSON

This session provided information about the Massachusetts alternative education landscape and how it is organized to provide optional pathways to graduation for out of school youth. Anderson of Phoenix Charter Academy Network described how that charter system is finding ways to “do it better” in getting students to graduation.

In Massachusetts, alternative education was identified in 2008 as a promising approach for reducing a 20 percent dropout rate and in 2012 as a potential way to deliver continuous learning for students who were suspended or expelled. Alternative education can be offered in separate schools or as programs within a school or district. Funding and, thus, accountability stay with the district so there is motivation for the district and program to work collaboratively to provide students with needed services. Through its research with seven Massachusetts districts, Culbertson of the Rennie Center identified the following five elements key to successful alternative education programs:

1. Flexible instructional and support strategies to accommodate individual students' needs and lives.
2. A focus on students' personal experiences and future goals.
3. A hands-on career-oriented component, fostering multiple learning domains.
4. Personalized curriculum to engage students and accelerate learning.
5. Consistent tracking of student progress toward achieving academic and nonacademic goals.

The Phoenix Charter Academy Network exemplifies these strategies but adds a component of academic rigor to prepare graduates for postsecondary options. Its mission is to operate schools

that challenge disconnected students with rigorous academics and relentless support so students recast themselves as resilient, self-sufficient adults in order to succeed in high school, college, and beyond. Its schools support students academically with flexible scheduling, high-dosage tutoring, advanced placement classes, and independent lab-based learning. Each student has a goal-driven academic plan that is checked regularly by staff, who make adjustments as needed to encourage growth. To promote academic and behavioral growth, staff build supportive relationships with students, making every effort to foster and leverage the grit and resilience that reengaged dropouts already possess.

The Rennie Center research identifies several other areas for strengthening alternative education in Massachusetts: developing appropriate accountability measures for the unique circumstances in alternative schools; increasing the state's capacity to serve larger numbers of at-risk students in alternative programs; and creating mechanisms for understanding and disseminating promising and effective practices from alternative schools to district public schools. Despite the need for improvement, programs like Phoenix provide a model for what alternative schools can accomplish: 70 percent of Phoenix students achieved advanced or proficient scores on the state assessment and 100 percent of graduates were accepted to college.

Can Online Learning Support Critically At-Risk Students?

JULIE EVANS AND MARIA WORTHEN

The presenters represented the International Association for K-12 Online Learning and Project Tomorrow. Both organizations focus on collecting and sharing information to advocate for and to inform online and blended learning policies, plans, and programs at the federal, state, and local levels. Based on practical experience and new research, the presenters conveyed the benefits of online learning in general and for at-risk students in particular.

Online and blended learning can help close the opportunity gap in education by expanding learning opportunities otherwise unavailable to low-income students, students in small or rural communities, out of school youth, and others. The majority of high schools report using online learning for credit recovery and for keeping students on pace to graduate. When well designed and implemented, components of digital competency-based learning are well-matched for educating at-risk students for the following reasons:

- » Students advance upon mastery.
- » It provides explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that can empower students.
- » Assessment is meaningful and can create a positive learning experience for students.
- » Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.
- » Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge, along with the development of important skills and dispositions.

The presenters summarized multiple research studies showing that student outcomes from blended learning exceeded both traditional learning outcomes and online instruction-only outcomes. Blended learning was defined as

online instruction with face-to-face teacher interaction. Other studies based on student survey results show that students particularly like that digital learning can personalize instruction, use relevant and engaging materials, is collaborative, and “un-tethers” them from classroom and community boundaries. Many students indicated frustration with the unsophisticated use of technologies by teachers and the considerable digital disconnect between students and adults.

The presenters advised forum participants that educators and those currently responsible for designing schooling have much to learn from the students themselves. Students often function as a “digital advance team,” regularly adopting and adapting emerging technologies for learning in novel ways. Additionally, the presenters acknowledged the need for more information, recommending further examination of the entire digital learning process to design higher quality inputs (e.g., courses, online programs), more pathways for learning, and development and use of performance metrics that incentivize continuous improvement for both teachers and students. This kind of online learning has the potential to — in the words of Project Tomorrow’s mission — “Ensure that today’s students are prepared to become tomorrow’s leaders, innovators, and engaged citizens.”

Collective Action: From Grassroots to the Capitol

MELANIE ANDERSON, JESSICA CARDICHON, AND JUSTIN SMITH

Alternative schools that serve to reengage dropouts make up a very small piece of the education lobby. In this interactive session, the presenters offered practical advice about ways to influence meaningful change at the federal, state, and local levels.

Education policy regarding dropouts is often driven by interpretations of statistics and is rarely informed by interaction with out of school youth. For that reason, a good starting place for collective action is to have education leaders and legislators meet with members of this population. Such meetings can help dispel myths and yield greater understanding about out of school youth and their circumstances. While dropout and graduation data tell an important but familiar story, hearing directly from struggling students and out of school youth about their personal and academic challenges, and their aspirations to graduate and to develop job skills, is a compelling experience that can shape opinion and influence policy. The presenters consider the most effective advocacy strategy to be “getting policymakers out of their offices,” inviting them on listening tours or field trips in their districts that showcase schools and allow them to talk directly with students and educators. “A picture is worth a thousand letters

or emails when you can see kids and learn firsthand what’s working or not working,” said one presenter.

In conversation with forum participants, a number of other promising strategies for weighing in on policy issues were proposed:

- » Write FAQs to inform policymakers about critical issues.
- » Send email action alerts and use social media to send messages to legislators and others in support of key concerns.
- » Contribute information to legislative campaigns and voter information materials.
- » Prepare op-ed pieces for the news.
- » Arrange talking points for policymakers to use in speeches and interviews.
- » Develop a single, concise, and informed message to convey to policymakers.
- » Join groups like RAPSA to connect with like-minded people to advance a cause.

Continuous Improvement: A Look at Two Approaches for Improving Alternative Accountability

BILL CLARKE, SUSAN MILLER BARKER, JENNIFER ROBISON, AND LESLIE TALBOT

School leaders from Ohio and New York described some of the challenges that alternative charter schools face in serving over-age and under-credited youth and dropouts who return to school to earn a diploma. Both states were early adopters of alternative accountability systems. The presenters shared their approaches for advocating for change to improve the systems and expand the states' reach for at-promise students.

In Ohio, high school graduation requirements have made obtaining a diploma especially difficult for reengaged dropouts who, like traditional students, must pass the five-part state exit exam. To address the state's dropout challenge, a new collaboration between state and local education agencies, a charter school authorizer, and recovery schools (i.e., charter schools dedicated to reengaging dropouts) were funded to serve 1,000 dropouts under age 22 across the state. Some alternative accountability measures for these programs were negotiated as part of the state's *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* waiver to support recovery schools, and development of other measures is underway. A new option has been funded on a trial basis to address the particular needs of students who age out of the public schools at 22 but reenroll to earn a high school diploma. These over-age students may attend evening recovery schools at designated public school sites after traditional students have left for the day. Per-pupil funding for these older students is lower than that for students 18 or younger, and it is not reimbursable to the school until a student completes a set number of credits or obtains a diploma. Accountability measures for these alternative schools have not been defined.

In New York, state and local education agencies, a charter school authorizer, and the State University of New York Charter Schools Institute are collaborating

to enhance school design principles and performance outcomes for district and charter high schools serving students who are off track to graduate. The group advocates for using mastery rather than chronological time as an accountability metric. All students in New York must pass the five Regents exams to earn a diploma, but large numbers of alternative students age out of school before passing. So the group has advocated for alternatives. One example of an alternative that is now available is that students can substitute a career-technical education exam for one of the Regents exams. This group is also exploring alternative accountability for charter schools serving off-track students. Currently, authorizers hold charter schools accountable for meeting performance targets before renewing their five-year charter. Yet given that reentry students require multiple years to catch up, it is nearly impossible for these schools to present meaningful data in time for the renewal evaluation.

Forum participants shared similar stories from their own states of school accountability measures that do not fit the needs of the at-risk students they serve. They found the presenters' recommendation that districts and individual charter schools serve as "incubators of innovation" to be a particularly helpful notion for generating alternative accountability measures in a state.

Demonstrating Mastery at the High School for the Recording Arts

PAULA ANDERSON, TONY SIMMONS, AND DARIO TARO

In this interactive session, the presenters introduced the innovative curricular, instructional, and assessment approaches used at the High School for the Recording Arts for reengaging at-promise students and holding them accountable for achieving high standards and earning a diploma. Alternative methods for demonstrating success as a school were also discussed.

Founded in 1998 in St. Paul, Minnesota, to reengage students who were academically unsuccessful in traditional schools, the High School for the Recording Arts focuses on music and digital media arts and the exploration and operation of related enterprises. It serves students ages 14-21 who typically enter behind in course credits and who, prior to enrollment, had not attended school in over six months. Most students at the school have experienced multiple setbacks in life: 60 percent have been involved with the juvenile justice system and 48 percent have experienced homelessness. The school's goal is to "turn their light switch on" through the use of music and media digital arts in project-based learning on authentic community-based issues that matter to the students. While the school reports that project-based learning fosters academic growth as well as responsibility, creativity, and motivation in students, it has found it difficult to measure student gains and to demonstrate success on conventionally reported accountability measures.

The school uses nontraditional methods within the project-based learning model for students to demonstrate mastery in 12 validation areas, from reading and writing to resilience, philosophy, and emotional awareness to artistic expression. Over the years, it has developed processes for calibrating student work with standards in these areas. Content experts at the school validate the level of rigor of the student work relative to the standards. Rather than more-traditional assignments, students might be asked to write a script, produce and direct a film, develop and administer a survey, write an editorial, or develop a business plan as part of their project. Students are also held accountable for growth on the standardized Northwest Evaluation Association tests.

The presenters challenged participants to "open up their minds" and develop creative and authentic learning opportunities for students and to measure success in equally creative and authentic ways. Their message was that it is possible to build an alternative accountability system with persistence and evidence, and by listening to student voices.

Do Critically At-Risk Students Suffer From Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

AMY LANSING

This session described the academic, behavioral, and developmental dysregulation that can occur when students are exposed to chronic stress in their lives. Drawing on emerging neurobehavioral and adverse childhood experiences research, Lansing made the case that post-traumatic stress disorder can interfere with learning.

Brain development and functioning in children is dramatically altered by trauma associated with poverty, family abuse and neglect, and community violence. About 42 percent of K-12 students have experienced a trauma, and studies show that experiencing high levels of traumatic stress can produce smaller brains, decrease IQ, and impair self-regulatory behaviors, as well as lead to poor physical health, mood control, and decision-making outcomes. Research also shows that maternal stress, such as experiencing domestic violence, can create an in-utero environment with elevated levels of the hormone cortisol, which is toxic to a developing fetus and associated with delayed development that can hurt children throughout their lives. Based on this research, Lansing concluded that unaddressed trauma is related to a number of the school issues faced by students who drop out or who are in the juvenile justice system.

Lansing reminded educators and policymakers that human brains continue to develop throughout young adulthood and that

interventions can result in better outcomes. Trauma-informed practices can be used effectively in school settings. For example, educators can reframe the question from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What’s happened to you?” as a way to communicate caring and to shift from talking about a character deficit to talking about behavior that can change. Teachers can model self-regulation; replace punishments with prosocial consequences; minimize triggers for anger, anxiety, or withdrawal in the classroom; ensure consistent adult relationships; convey high expectation messages about learning and behavior; and teach students how not to take certain behaviors personally. Lastly, Lansing cautioned that educators and policymakers can be dismissive of the idea that at-risk students suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder since this disorder evokes images of combat trauma and frightening outbursts of anger or violence. Both educators and policymakers need to connect impeded learning with damage caused by stress.

Don't Call Them Dropouts!

CRAIG MCCLAY AND JON ZAFF

The America's Promise Alliance conducted a study of over 2,000 out of school youth ages 18-25 to document the experiences of those who left school before graduating. Their stories, published in the report *Don't Call Them Dropouts: Understanding the Experiences of Young People Who Leave High School Before Graduation*, create a picture of resilience, personal agency, courage, and optimism, describing why these students left school and why, despite dealing with very challenging circumstances, nearly two thirds of them returned to school and obtained a high school diploma.

The study was designed to examine: 1) why students leave school before graduating, 2) why some students return to school, and 3) what helps or is a barrier to reengagement. Over 200 out of school youth participated in nationwide focus groups and nearly 2,000 participated in online surveys to address these questions.

The findings show that no single factor is responsible for students leaving school. Those who left before graduating often struggled with overwhelmingly adverse life circumstances, and it was a cluster of personal, family, community, and school factors that pushed school so far down their priority lists. Out of school youth described living in "toxic environments," typically characterized by family violence and abuse, unsafe schools and neighborhoods, unmet personal and family health needs, and schools that were not responsive to their circumstances. Over half of the students who had histories of interrupted schooling also experienced four or more adverse life experiences, compared to less than 15 percent of their peers who were enrolled continuously in high school.

Out of school youth expressed a strong desire for supportive connections. Those who left high school emphasized how much the influence of peers, parents, teachers, and other adults

mattered to their personal expectations, behaviors, and decisions. When supportive connections were lacking, they were more likely to disengage from school before graduating. Particularly vulnerable were those who had a parent in jail, who were in the foster care system, or who were homeless or changed schools frequently. Unsympathetic or unaware educators can also contribute to "pushing out" these students. In contrast, when caring adults build supportive connections it can mitigate the effects of trauma and encourage dropouts to return to and succeed in school. Successful re-entry programs create safe havens for students by providing caring adults and wraparound support services to address their needs.

Despite their challenges, the study concluded, many students with histories of interrupted schooling were on a path to "bouncing back and reaching up." The presenters shared stories of students who showed persistence and resilience in the face of adversity and were on a path to success in all aspects of their lives. They encouraged forum participants to create cadres of "community navigators" to ensure that students get what they need to stay in school. Dropout recovery, they explained, is more than second chances; it is third, fourth, fifth, and sixth chances.

Graduation Rates for Reengaged Dropouts: Politics of Unintended Consequences

JESSICA CARDICHON, ERNIE SILVA, AND TONY SIMMONS

The presenters included an advocate from the Alliance for Excellent Education, an organization that was instrumental in the national adoption of the four-year cohort graduation rate. The other presenters represented dropout recovery schools for which use of the four-year cohort rate unintentionally misrepresents their schools' successes.

The presentation included a discussion of how the four-year graduation rate has improved school accountability data but does not fit the context of dropout recovery schools since students in these schools are typically out of school for an extended period of time and do not fit in four-, five-, or even six-year cohorts. There was agreement that eligibility for an alternative graduation rate would need to be carefully defined so that it would not become an easy-out for traditional schools that primarily serve students expected to graduate in four years. Additionally, the presenters agreed that dropout recovery schools need a broader range of accountability metrics than the graduation rate alone. The session offered several proposals for modifying how graduation is measured and reported.

The first set of proposals addressed out of school youth who have not attended school for many years, and it is based on the premise that these students need a different graduation metric than other over-age and under-credited students. Since many out of school youth have been away for two or more years, even an extended cohort graduation rate might not reflect success. For this reason, some states use a "one-year rate" to report the percentage of a cohort of reenrolled students who are close to graduating based upon the number of credits they have earned. Another option would be to use a "reengagement rate," based on the number of students who have returned to school after dropping out and then stay long enough (e.g., at least a year) to be considered reengaged. Students who stay in school



after this initial period could be moved into a separate cohort whose graduation rate would be tracked each year. The premise of using a reengagement rate is that if traditional schools are given up to six years to engage and graduate a student, dropout recovery schools should be given at least one year to reengage students who have dropped out before the clock starts running on getting these students to graduation.

The second set of proposals addressed the extended five- or six-year cohort graduation rates that are reported in some school districts and states, and the presenters advocated, foremost, that all schools should report extended rates annually. Additionally, one proposed adjustment to the extended rates is the “Parthenon graduation rate,” which uses

the five- and six-year rates but only compares schools where more than half of the student population is off track to graduate. Another alternative is the “over-age, under-credited rate” that encourages all schools to use the extended cohort graduation rates but also adds a benchmark so that alternative schools can be assessed relative to similar schools — those with comparable percentages of over-age and under-credited students.

Efforts to support alternative students who have a longer path to graduation require new metrics and measures. Starting with proposals for altering the graduation rate, the presenters encouraged forum participants to continue to build a comprehensive alternative accountability system.



Holistic Performance Index

BOB RATH

Our Piece of the Pie is a youth development agency that helps at-risk urban youth ages 14-24 develop into at-promise young adults by offering a combination of education, employment, and personal supports. Drawing on years of providing intensive interventions for over-age and under-credited high school dropouts, Rath described key lessons learned from building an alternative accountability system that addresses students holistically.

The *Holistic Performance Index* is a data dashboard tool designed to measure the effects of Our Piece of the Pie interventions, its unique programming, culture, and learning opportunities, as well as individual student and agencywide progress toward achieving short-term, intermediate, and longer-term outcomes. It consists of the following student measures, each weighted as a percentage of the *Index*:

- » A quarterly measure using standardized assessments of mastery of academic content over time (40 percent).
- » A quarterly measure of daily school attendance to demonstrate that students are in class and maximizing instruction (20 percent).
- » A quarterly measure of credit accumulation to document the pace of earning missed credits (10 percent).
- » A quarterly measure of social and emotional growth to reference maturity (10 percent).

- » An ongoing measure of behavior to count incidents that interfere with learning (10 percent).
- » An ongoing measure of business/workforce development to recognize the importance of developing career competencies (10 percent).

A critical feature of the *Holistic Performance Index* is its focus on growth, with measurements taken regularly and over time, rather than using the point-in-time measures included in traditional accountability approaches. And while graduation is a goal of Our Piece of the Pie, the tool does not measure the rate of earning a diploma in a four-year timeframe since most returning dropouts will not graduate with their four-year cohort. Instead, Our Piece of the Pie proposes an alternative accountability approach, creating an “extended cohort” of students who could be measured for making progress from the time of reenrollment forward.

New Options and Opportunities Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

MELANIE ANDERSON, KISHA BIRD, AND JESSICA CARDICHON

In 2014, Congress reauthorized and significantly amended the *Workforce Investment Act*, now the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)*. The key provisions of the new law demonstrate a renewed commitment to workforce development with a focus on innovation and support for individual and national economic growth, and the policy intent has shifted to providing better and expanded opportunities to out of school youth.

With expanded education opportunities in career pathways and in workforce development, the *WIOA*:

- » Increases the focus on serving low-income adults and out of school youth.
- » Expands education and training options to help *WIOA* recipients access jobs that support self-sufficiency and advancement in their careers.
- » Helps disadvantaged and unemployed adults and out of school youth earn while learning through paid internships.
- » Aligns planning and accountability policies across core programs to support more unified approaches.

Among other important changes, the *WIOA* expands its age range and now serves out of school youth ages 16-24 and specifically targets eligible at-risk groups, such as youth in foster care, youth who are homeless, and English learners. The *WIOA* earmarks 75 percent of its funds to be spent on out of school youth and creates funding opportunities not available in the previous legislation.

Most *WIOA* provisions go into effect in July 2015 with full implementation one year later. Forum participants who work directly with at-risk youth were encouraged by the presenters to form new partnerships and to plan now to take advantage of these new programming and funding opportunities.



Over-age, Under-credited Students and Public Charter Schools

BETH ANDERSON, LINDA DAWSON, PHIL MATERO, BOB RATH, AND TONY SIMMONS

In 2014, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools published the report *Over-age, Under-credited Students and Public Charter Schools: An Exploration of Successes, Strategies, and Opportunities for Expansion*. The presenters said that, with about 900 alternative charter high schools nationwide that enroll mostly struggling students seeking another chance to earn a diploma, the report “elevates the recognition of what our schools do and gets the word out about what’s working and why we’re doing it.” In this session, leaders from the five charter schools profiled in the report shared five key practices for reengaging students at risk of dropping out.

- 1. Competency-based Progression.** The School for Integrated Academics and Technologies (SIATech) is a charter high school network with campuses nationwide that serves over-age and under-credited students who have dropped out of traditional schools. Its model includes caring professionals, individualized learning plans, a standards-based curriculum aligned with career and technical training, and a competency-based academic program. Since it is an open-entry and open-exit school, with students entering with varying levels of subject-matter mastery, the self-paced, computer-assisted approach enables students to progress through coursework at an accelerated or slower pace, depending on their individual learning needs. Once students demonstrate competency, they move to the next level of content in that subject.
- 2. Project-based Learning.** YouthBuild Charter School of California is a network of 19 dropout recovery schools statewide that serve at-risk students ages 16-24. Each school offers vocational training, counseling, leadership development, college preparation,

and a high school education taught through a project-based, interdisciplinary curriculum. Teachers help students to plan, carry out, and complete projects that link academic learning to real-world situations. At the end of each trimester, students and teachers also work together on a culminating community action project that revitalizes their communities.

- 3. Real-world Application.** The essential feature of the High School for the Recording Arts in Minnesota is its curriculum, which is tailored for each student, taught through project-based learning, and has real-world



applications to the music and digital media arts businesses. Curricular relevance and workforce development are keys to reengaging at-risk students in this school, which has multiple student enterprises, including music production facilities, a record label, a marketing business, and a commercial radio show. Teachers are trained to integrate music into the core academic curriculum; for example, song lyrics may be included in language arts classes.

4. Flexible Calendar and Extended Learning

Time. The Phoenix Charter Academy Network operates three schools in Massachusetts, and it adjusted the conventional school calendar to extend the school day to run from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and the school year to include 190 days. Since at-risk students need additional time to learn missed content and to accelerate the pace of credit accrual, the extended calendar provides more flexibility. Also, given

the instability of students' lives, Phoenix has multiple entry points each year for enrollment.

5. Holistic Student Supports. Path Academy in Connecticut is a charter school operated by Our Piece of the Pie, a community-based youth development agency. Key to its approach is a youth development specialist assigned to each student to reduce barriers to academic success. By coordinating local services, the school is able to offer holistic, wraparound supports to address learning disabilities, family problems, homelessness, drug and alcohol use, pregnancy and parenting, health and mental health conditions, legal troubles, and other challenges students face.

The presenters recommended that schools serving at-risk students incorporate each of these five promising curricular and instructional practices. When offered in combination, they can help over-age and under-credited students reengage in school and get on track to graduate.



Practice and Assessments with At-Promise Students

JOHNNA EARLY

This session highlighted the powerful connection between assessment, instruction, and practice by describing Righetti High School in California. The presenter used the school's Response to Intervention (RtI) framework to showcase how these connections can be systematically applied to appropriately place and instruct students and monitor achievement to improve student outcomes.

Righetti's focus on the connection between assessment, instruction, and practice builds on the notion that colleagues need to establish a focus for purposeful practice. Early noted that well-known authors Malcolm Gladwell, Daniel Coyle, and Doug Lemov have written extensively on the importance of purposeful practice in other fields, and that those ideas can be applicable to education as well. Lemov, for example, urges building systems to practice a process correctly with immediate feedback. In education, assessment can be used to form groups, identify the targeted areas for instruction, and monitor progress toward measureable and attainable objectives. Early recommended that a group spend 80 percent of their time working on the 20 most important skills. To encourage continuous improvement, educators should "encode success" using positive corrective feedback instead of critique to help students practice getting it right.

At Righetti High School, students were previously placed using teacher recommendations and standardized tests. This often resulted in inappropriate placements and poor results, with the school being sanctioned for low performance. Now, with a new RtI system in place, all incoming grade 9 students are given a computer adaptive placement test during their grade-8 year, prior to entering Righetti, and then placed in appropriate grade-9 math and English classes. There are four

class levels including benchmark classes for at-or above-grade-level students, and "on watch" intervention- and intensive-intervention-level classes for struggling students. Students are reassessed regularly so their teachers can adjust content and monitor progress, but how often the reassessments occur depends on their initial level. Intensive-intervention students are monitored every two weeks, intervention students every three weeks, on-watch students every four weeks, with all students taking benchmark assessments three times a year. Assessment results inform teacher instruction and the feedback they give to individual students. There is an intervention team at Righetti to maintain the RtI system, establishing procedures and defining roles and responsibilities for staff.

The intervention team at Righetti High School had some setbacks as they established their RtI system. There were technology hitches with the assessments and miscommunications with the feeder schools. In addition, some parents raised concerns about student placements. But the results were positive and the entire district is now implementing the assessment system. Forum participants were encouraged to explore the connections between assessment, instruction, and practice in their own schools and districts as one way to increase achievement for at-promise students.

Preparing Great Teachers for At-Promise Students

SARA A. BROWN, LISA DARLING-DANIEL, BEVERLY GILBERT, LAURA HERNANDEZ-FLORES, AND CAYCEE SLEDGE

Each year, 13 percent of the overall teacher workforce moves to another school or leaves the profession altogether. In high-poverty schools, the rate is even higher, at 20 percent. Among new teachers, about half leave the profession by the end of five years. The greatest exodus takes place in high-poverty, high-minority urban and rural public schools. This session described the type of induction supports offered by three different programs: the national New Teacher Center, the Ventura County Office of Education (California), and the Chicago Public Schools (Illinois), each of which aims to build the competencies of new teachers and to retain them in schools that serve the most challenging students.

The presenters, representing the three programs, emphasized that to work successfully with dropouts and other at-promise students, new teachers need specific kinds of induction supports. In addition to strengthening teachers' subject-matter expertise, induction programs need to help new teachers develop a range of instructional strategies that are targeted to the learning needs of struggling students, effective classroom management skills, and strategies to foster students' social and emotional growth.

The New Teacher Center offers a comprehensive support program that features new teacher mentoring, principal support, and district capacity building, while, at the same time, advocating for state and federal systems change. Its coaches help teachers to collaborate with each other, using assessment data to inform standards-based practice. The coaches also focus on developing leadership skills and local policies to build a "pipeline to principalship."

The Ventura program focuses on helping new teachers to better understand the complex lives of their alternative students and to integrate social and emotional learning into the curriculum, instruction, climate, and culture of the

school. It also trains alternative school teachers to differentiate instruction and assessment and to design more equitable and inclusive behavior management approaches and learning environments to reengage their students.

The Chicago program modifies its district induction process for teachers who work in the district's "option schools," which make up the network of alternative pathways and nontraditional learning environments for dropouts who return to school to earn a diploma. Encouragement for new alternative school teachers is critical and they are teamed with mentors whose job is to counter teacher resignation and any "I can't do that with my kids" lament.

Collectively, the presenters' key point was that, in order to ensure that their students achieve success, teachers need specific knowledge, skills, and supports that match the context of alternative school settings. More generally, the presenters identified the need for a national pipeline for developing new teachers for alternative schools and for a network to advocate for best practices in teaching at-promise students — a role they believe RAPSA can play.

Recovering Lost Time: Reengaging Students Through College and Community

MIGUEL CONTRERAS AND JILL MARKS

This session focused on the Gateway to College National Network, a recovery program for students ages 16-21 who have dropped out of high school or are significantly behind in course credits for their age. It is geared to students who face learning challenges and risks associated with drug or alcohol use, family abuse or neglect, or living in high-poverty communities. Drawing on 10 years of implementation experience, Contreras and Marks described the program and program practices that have shown promising results.

Dual enrollment — a process through which students complete their high school diploma requirements on a college campus while also earning college credits — is the foundation of the Gateway to College program. Located in 43 colleges in 23 states, and partnering with over 100 school districts, the program has graduated over 2,000 students and served over 15,000 students. It takes most students more than four years to complete the program and a willingness to work through obstacles to school success. “The power of place and support,” said Contreras, “has a huge effect on positive behavior and academic results.” Highlights of student outcomes in the program include: high attendance rates, improved academic performance resulting in reduced dropout rates and increased college credit accumulation, a greater connection to school, and higher personal aspirations.

The presenters attributed program success to a number of essential practices. For example, the program helps to ensure that students receive a

tuition-free education by facilitating formal partnerships between school districts and community colleges — partnerships that enable a stable funding structure and seamless enrollment. In addition, all students receive wraparound supports to meet their academic, social, and emotional needs. Student resource specialists with small caseloads provide student supports at each campus. With the majority of students being first-generation college attendees, these specialists help them adjust to college life and develop a personalized academic plan geared for graduation and a college pathway. Gateway to College also works intensively with teachers to use innovative instructional approaches to engage reluctant and struggling learners, including flexible scheduling and opportunities to explore careers through the curriculum. Educators and counselors across the program sites are linked through a professional learning community, enabling them to share practices that work.

Reengagement Efforts in San Diego, Chicago, and Beyond: How a Citywide Approach Provides Students a Second Chance

IAN GORDON, ANDREW MOORE, BECKY PHILLPOTT, CAYCEE SLEDGE, AND TRACY TEMPLIN

Out of school youth often require wide-ranging and intensive personal and family supports to return to school and to work toward earning a high school diploma or GED. Reengagement centers are a citywide intervention — “a soup-to-nuts hub” for reengaging youth ages 16-24 who have been disconnected from school and employment by linking them to wraparound supports. The presenters explained that while the centers vary by community, each is designed to provide outreach to at-risk students; assessment of each student’s personal strengths and needs; referrals to community services; reenrollment support; education and other social and emotional interventions; and supports to keep them enrolled through graduation.

The San Diego reengagement center is actually not a single “brick-and-mortar center” but rather a collaboration of cross-sector agencies that leverage public and private funds and deliver services to out of school youth. Participating agencies include the school district; the community college district; city and county law enforcement, health, and workforce agencies; and community-based service and philanthropic organizations. Overseen by the San Diego Youth Development Office, reengagement activities include developing a life plan that maps a path through high school and/or job training completion, and the use of mentors and coaches to provide customized case-managed supports to individual students. The key is ensuring wrap-around supports without interruption or duplication as students move through various education, health, workforce, and legal agencies.

In contrast, Chicago’s Student Outreach and Reengagement (SOAR) network of three phys-

ical centers are located in neighborhoods with high concentrations of truants and dropouts and nearby public alternative schools and programs. Center reengagement specialists are responsible for locating dropouts, conducting an intake assessment to identify barriers to school success, brokering personal and family supports, and conducting a mandatory two-week workshop to prepare dropouts for reentry to an appropriate academic institution. Reengagement facilitators analyze high school transcripts, develop graduation plans, recommend school placements, and facilitate reenrollment. Credit recovery options are available for students awaiting reenrollment. Mentoring, counseling, tutoring, and other supports offered by community partners are case managed by SOAR staff.

One presenter explained that the reengagement center approach “weaves a needed school and community safety net” for reentering students.

Social Emotional Learning: Infusing It into School Culture to Effect Positive Change in Local Control Accountability Plan/ Local Control Funding Formula Priorities of School Climate, Student Engagement, and Student Achievement

JOELLE HOOD

This presentation made a case for infusing key components of social and emotional learning throughout the school day to improve academic, social, and developmental outcomes for at-risk students. Hood described what social and emotional learning is, how it can be implemented, and its many benefits to students and schools.

With the introduction of California's Local Control Funding Formula, which requires districts to develop plans that address state priorities, including strengthening student engagement and school climate, heightened attention and new funding are focused on supporting social and emotional learning during the school day. Research indicates that when social and emotional learning is infused in school curriculum, instruction, culture, and climate, it can result in a number of positive student outcomes, such as reducing aggression, promoting helping behavior, improving positive attitudes, and increasing academic achievement. Social and emotional competencies involve intrapersonal and interpersonal knowledge, skills, and attitudes that can be modeled, taught, and

learned through practice and feedback. These competencies include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

In this interactive session, the presenter demonstrated through activities with forum participants, and illustrated in video clips, the power of social and emotional learning to effect positive change. She encouraged participants to create a "pedagogy of possibility" in their classrooms and schools through the use of such activities as meditation, "pro-kindness synergy days," and "happiness sprinkling" to support positive character traits of empathy, kindness, and generosity. The presenter argued that social-emotional resiliency should become the fourth "R" in schooling.

The County Office View: What a Difference Commitment Makes

TOM CHANGNON, MATTHEW LAPLANTE, AND KENNETH YOUNG

This session was a call to action for educators who work in county offices of education to institute supports for out of school or over-age and under-credited youth by forging partnerships with multiple agencies. Authentic relationships between educators and students, as well as between the county offices of education and other agencies, are key to successful reengagement work.

LaPlante framed the conversation by sharing data that unequivocally show dropouts to have significantly less earning power and to be much more likely to be victims of crime or to experience homelessness compared to high school graduates. He urged educators to act quickly and decisively to change these life trajectories. He shared profiles of students who had been “outliers” from the general school population, those with significant risk factors in their lives but who had received supports matched to their needs and who had beat the odds and were doing well. County offices, he explained, are uniquely positioned to create support programs with multiple agencies to help every outlier become a successful student.

The other presenters were county superintendents from California’s Riverside County and Stanislaus County. They shared several examples about how their offices have been attempting to address the many and varied needs of at-risk students. To start with, they said, county offices of education need to know who is at risk of school failure and who has dropped out and why. Young stressed that in Riverside County educators identify early signals that students might be at risk of dropping out later, and focus on addressing reading proficiency in grade 3 and monitoring daily attendance. Changnon

described some of the initiatives Stanislaus County has started with partnering agencies; for example, a community-wide campaign to promote attendance, summer enrichment opportunities, and kindergarten readiness programs are offered to address early risk factors. The county has also sponsored parent awareness programs to help families understand, for example, the importance of academic engagement, grit, and perseverance in successfully getting their students to graduation. Most importantly, these county offices did not act alone. The superintendents emphasized the value of partnering across the K-14 system and with other agencies and advocacy organizations to provide support services, childcare, career technical education, and college courses — doing “whatever it takes” to help students find the right path to graduation and beyond.

Forum participants were encouraged to be proactive and to use what they already know to help realize the potential of at-risk students. While the presenters acknowledged that there is no single answer for the myriad challenges facing at-risk students, counties can marshal wide-ranging community resources and creatively and successfully encourage students to stay in school and to earn a diploma.

Update on the Measuring Educational Quality and Accountability Survey

JODY ERNST AND JIM GRIFFIN

The *Measuring Educational Quality and Accountability Survey* began as a 2013 survey of educators that questioned how alternative schools measure the academic and social and emotional growth of at-risk students. This “learning from the landscape effort” has since expanded into a national research and development collaborative to improve policy, performance measures, and accountability systems for alternative schools and the students they serve. The presenters provided an update on the National Opportunity Youth Collaborative, which is advancing the work initiated by the survey in three important ways:

- » Building a data and information repository on accurate performance measures and accountability systems for opportunity youth. The repository has data on 2,600 alternative schools, of which about 400 are charter schools. Additionally, related state policies and authorizer practices are compiled. While still under development, the repository will eventually provide detailed information about effective alternative accountability practices and offer school-level data displays comparing specific measures across demographically similar schools.
- » Working with schools, charter authorizers, and other K-12 stakeholders to strengthen alternative accountability practices, informed by data in the repository.
- » Improving public policy focused on alternative accountability. This effort includes but

is not limited to helping states define the schools eligible for alternative accountability and designing flexibility in traditional systems to customize rigorous and relevant assessments and performance targets for individual schools and student subgroups.

The presenters cautioned forum participants not to wait for state policymakers and charter authorizers to develop alternative accountability systems. They called, instead, for schools to innovate, collect data, examine policies and practices, and “generate proof of concept.” The “holy grail,” they said, is to have an empirical base that guides the development of incontrovertible alternative metrics and measures.

An Informed and Determined Voice for Change

**Policy and Practice Recommendations from the
2014 Alternative Accountability Policy Forum**

Forum participants brought expertise and innovation to proposals for rethinking accountability and building more responsive federal, state, and local systems. Based on the research and practices presented and the facilitated discussions in the sessions, the participants identified 10 policy and practice priorities to improve outcomes for at-risk students and the alternative schools that serve them. Changing the system can transform lives, helping at-risk students to graduate and become young adults at-promise of success.

Federal and State Policy

Policymakers should consider endorsing the following practical and promising accountability and funding strategies for alternative students and schools:

1. FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL STUDENT LEARNING GAINS.

Academic growth measures, rather than point-in-time achievement on standardized measures, are a better gauge of the progress of alternative students, who often reenter school far below grade level in knowledge, skills, and course completion. These students can be assessed at set intervals against a baseline established at their reenrollment to determine the proportion of students who meet or exceed expected learning gains. Results can be compared to other alternative schools that serve similar students.

2. USE MULTIPLE METRICS OF INDIVIDUAL STUDENT PROGRESS.

In addition to measuring academic growth, other key attributes of student progress should be measured because they are essential for at-risk students getting on track to graduate. These include attendance, credit accumulation, behavior, social and emotional skills, community engagement and civic responsibility, high school completion other than a standard diploma, and college and career readiness. Metrics need to be specific to the school mission and appropriate measures of progress.

3. ALLOW AN ALTERNATIVE COHORT FOR DROPOUT RECOVERY.

The standard four-year cohort on-time graduation rate does not reflect the circumstances of reengaged dropouts who are behind in credits and require additional years to graduate. Instead of measuring a cohort based on when a student is expected to graduate, the rate should measure the real number of reengaged students who actually graduate each year.

4. MEASURE REENGAGEMENT WITHOUT PENALTY.

As an incentive to schools to reenroll out of school youth, a reengagement rate should be included as a state and federal accountability metric. The cohort calculations should be adjusted so that a student who reenrolls is not counted adversely toward a school's graduation, dropout, or any other accountability rate. Moreover, a reengagement rate should serve to measure the capacity of schools to reengage returning students. Including the number of reengaged students as a "similar schools" metric would help to level the playing field between alternative and traditional high schools.

5. EQUITABLY FUND ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS THAT SERVE AT-RISK STUDENTS.

Federal and state education funds should be weighted so that students who require dropout recovery services, such as extended learning, wraparound supports, and individualized instruction, should receive additional per-pupil funds to cover any additional costs. These funds should follow each student to the school, district, or community-based organization that is educating them.

Local Practice

School and district leaders and charter school authorizers should consider using the following practical and promising practices:

6. ADOPT A FLEXIBLE SCHOOL DAY AND CALENDAR.

Open entry/open exit enrollment allows for students to begin instruction at any point in the calendar and as needed to complete their high school coursework. Extending learning time by lengthening the school day, school week, or school year can also help to reengage students who have employment or family caretaking responsibilities or transportation challenges and increase time for academic learning, support services, and enrichment activities to enhance student achievement.

7. PROVIDE WRAPAROUND SUPPORTS.

For out of school youth to return to school and focus on academic learning there must be supports to help them manage wide-ranging personal struggles with poverty, family dysfunction, trauma, health, mental health, legal, and other issues that impede school success. Providing access to comprehensive supports requires schools to establish firm partnerships with locally based service providers and delivery systems that are accessible for students.

8. OFFER A COMPETENCY-BASED ACADEMIC PROGRAM.

Instead of the traditional seat time schedule approach to completing coursework and earning credit, students can progress by demonstrating mastery of academic content regardless of time, place, or pace of learning. This flexible way to earn credits can be delivered through classroom instruction as well as online and blended learning, dual enrollment, project-based learning, and credit recovery programs, allowing students to set the pace of learning and allowing teachers to give short-cycle assessments to measure growth and inform instruction.

9. DIFFERENTIATE AND INDIVIDUALIZE INSTRUCTION.

To reengage out of school youth in academic learning and to accelerate the pace of credit recovery, content and instruction should match the individual learning needs, abilities, and interests of each student. An individual learning or “next-step” plan can chart each student’s academic and personal needs, interests, and supports; course transcripts; workforce development experiences; and postsecondary goals, while monitoring progress toward graduation and beyond.

10. DELIVER A RELEVANT CURRICULUM.

Curricular relevance and workforce development are keys to reengaging at-risk students. Teaching and learning should focus on applying concepts and skills in real-world contexts, and content should also connect to the cultures, communities, and career aspirations of students.

Presenters



BETH ANDERSON

Anderson is the Chief Executive Officer and founder of the Phoenix Charter Academy Network of three schools in Massachusetts with more than 100 innovative educators serving over 500 students. She is an alumna of Brandeis University, Harvard Graduate School of Education, and Teach for America. Anderson was a presenter in the sessions Alternative Schools in Massachusetts and Over-age, Under-credited Students and Public Charter Schools.



MELANIE ANDERSON

Anderson is the Director of Government Affairs at Opportunity Nation where she sets the legislative priorities of the Opportunity Nation Campaign, working with a coalition of over 300 organizations to find common ground on policy changes that aim to strengthen education and career pathways for young adults. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from Iowa State University. Anderson was a presenter in the sessions New Options and Opportunities Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and Collective Action: From Grassroots to the Capitol.



PAULA ANDERSON

Anderson is the Education Director at the High School for Recording Arts in Minnesota. She received Bachelor of Arts degrees in English and secondary education from the College of St. Benedict and a Master of Arts degree in liberal studies from Hamline University, and is a winner of the Urban Teaching Award from the Council of Great City Schools. Anderson was a panelist in the session Demonstrating Mastery at High School for Recording Arts.



KISHA BIRD

Bird is Interim Director of the Center for Law and Social Policy's youth policy team and Project Director for the Campaign for Youth, a national coalition co-chaired by the Center and the Corps Network. She received a Master of Social Service degree and a Master of Law and Social Policy degree from Bryn Mawr College Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research. Bird was a panelist in the session New Options and Opportunities Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.



SARA A. BROWN

Brown is an Instructional Support Leader for the Office of Education Options in the Chicago Public Schools, which includes programming for students who are court involved, expelled from the district, pregnant and parenting, or reengaged youth. She received a Master of Arts degree from Columbia University in international educational development and a Master of Education degree from the University of Illinois at Chicago in instructional leadership. Brown was a panelist in the session Preparing Great Teachers for At-Promise Students.



JESSICA CARDICHON

Cardichon is Senior Director of Policy and Advocacy for the Alliance for Excellent Education. She received a Master of Arts degree and a Doctor of Education degree in politics and education from Teachers College, Columbia University, and a Juris Doctor degree from Pace University School of Law. Cardichon was a presenter in the session Graduation Rates for Reengaged Dropouts: Politics of Unintended Consequences and was a panelist in the sessions New Options and Opportunities Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and Collective Action: From Grassroots to the Capitol.



TOM CHANGNON

Changnon has served as the elected Stanislaus County Superintendent of Schools since 2007 and has championed civics education, character development, parent involvement, career/technical education, and increasing graduation rates in his county. A graduate of Stanford University, he was drafted by the Houston Astros following college. Changnon was a panelist in the session The County Office View: What a Difference Commitment Makes.



BILL CLARKE

Clarke is the Director of New York State's Office for School Innovation with responsibilities for charter school authorizing and school turnaround in the state's lowest performing traditional public schools. He received Bachelor of Arts degrees in English and Spanish from the University of Texas at Austin, a Master of Education degree in curriculum and instruction from the University of Mississippi, and a Master of Education degree in educational leadership from Providence College. Clarke was a panelist in the session Continuous Improvement: A Look at Two Approaches for Improving Alternative Accountability.



MIGUEL CONTRERAS, JR.

Contreras is the Director of the Gateway College and Career Academy at Riverside Community College in California. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology from the University of California at Irvine and a Master of Science degree in student development in higher education at California State University at Long Beach. Contreras was a panelist in the session Recovering Lost Time: Reengaging Students Through College and Community.



NINA CULBERTSON

Culbertson is a senior researcher at the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy where she works to improve public education through well-informed decision-making based on a deep knowledge of evidence of effective policymaking and practice. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in human development and a Master of Education degree in education research, measurement, and evaluation from Boston College. Culbertson was a panelist in the session Alternative Schools in Massachusetts.



JENNY CURTIN

Curtin is the Coordinator of High School Graduation Initiatives at the Massachusetts Department of Education where she oversees several state efforts related to supporting students who are most likely to drop out of high school, including the multi-faceted MassGrad initiative that provides funding and training to schools statewide, the state's Early Warning Indicator System, and the state funded Alternative Education grant program. She is an alumna of the national Education Policy Fellowship Program, and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology and a Master of Public Policy degree from Tulane University. Curtin was a presenter in the session Alternative Accountability Policy: The Action Is at the State Level.



LISA DARLING-DANIEL

Darling-Daniel is a coordinator and instructor for the Ventura County Office of Education. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from San Diego State University and National Board Certification in early adolescent mathematics. Darling-Daniel was a panelist in the session Preparing Great Teachers for At-Promise Students.



LINDA C. DAWSON

Dawson is the Superintendent and Chief Education Officer of SIATech, a network of charter schools focused on dropout recovery. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of California at Santa Barbara, a Master of Science degree from Eastern Kentucky University, and a Doctor of Education degree from the United States International University. Dawson was a panelist in the session Over-age, Under-credited Students and Public Charter Schools.



JOHNNA EARLY

Early is the National Education Advisor at Renaissance Learning and brings 25 years of education experience in support of programs developed to accelerate curricular learning for all. She was a panelist in the session Practice and Assessments with At-Promise Students.



DELAINE EASTIN

Eastin served as the California State Superintendent of Public Instruction from 1995 to 2003, the first and only woman in state history elected to that position. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of California at Davis and a Master of Arts degree from the University of California at Santa Barbara. Eastin closed the policy forum with a presentation entitled *Moving Forward Together*.



JODY ERNST

Ernst is the founding Vice President of Research and Policy Analytics for Momentum Strategy & Research, a nonprofit organization dedicated to conducting collaborative research serving charter schools across the country where she studies the growth of high-risk students and frameworks to hold alternative education accountable. She received a Doctor of Philosophy degree in differential psychology from the University of Texas at Austin. Ernst was a presenter in the session Update on the Measuring Educational Quality and Accountability Survey.



JULIE EVANS

Evans is the Chief Executive Officer of Project Tomorrow, a leading education nonprofit organization where she developed the Speak Up National Research Project in 2003 and has served as the chief researcher on multiple digital learning research projects. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science at Brown University. Evans was a panelist in the session Can Online Learning Support Critically At-Risk Students?



BEVERLY GILBERT

Gilbert is the Director of Professional Development at SIATech where she has created and implemented professional development programs including SIATech's Induction Program that awards California General Education and Education Specialist Clear Credentials each year. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in mathematics from Wheaton College and a Master of Education Administration degree from Point Loma University. She was a panelist in the session Preparing Great Teachers for At-Promise Students.



IAN GORDON

Gordon is the Director of the San Diego Youth Development Office where he works to facilitate systems and community-level change that supports positive youth development strategies and outcomes. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in human development from Howard University and a Master of Science degree in human development and family studies from Pennsylvania State University. Gordon was a presenter in the session Reengagement Efforts in San Diego, Chicago, and Beyond: How a Citywide Approach Provides Students a Second Chance.



JIM GRIFFIN

Griffin is the founding president of Momentum Strategy & Research, a nonprofit organization dedicated to conducting collaborative research among the many organizations serving charter schools nationwide, and was the founding president of the Colorado League of Charter Schools. He was a presenter in the session Update on the Measuring Educational Quality and Accountability Survey.



DONALD G. HAUGHT

Haught served as Executive Director for the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Accrediting Commission. He received a Bachelor of Science degree and a Master of Science degree from Oklahoma State University, and a Doctor of Education degree in school administration with emphasis in personnel management and curriculum from the University of Southern California. Haught was a moderator in the panel session Accreditation for Schools Serving At-Promise Youth.



LAURA HERNANDEZ-FLORES

Hernandez-Flores is Director of the New Teacher Center in Los Angeles, California, a national organization dedicated to improving student learning by accelerating the effectiveness of new teachers and school leaders. She received Bachelor of Arts degrees in English and political science from the University of California at Los Angeles, a Master of Arts degree in secondary education from Loyola Marymount University, and a Doctor of Education degree in educational leadership from the University of Southern California. Hernandez-Flores was a panelist in the session Preparing Great Teachers for At-Promise Students.



LIZ HESSOM

Hesson is the Director of Education for SIATech in California. She received a Master of Arts degree in educational administration from National University. She was a moderator in the panel session Can Online Learning Support Critically At-Risk Students?



JOELLE HOOD

Hood is a certified trainer for the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, 40 Developmental Assets, Understanding the Culture of Poverty, and 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens, and was recently named 2014 Principal of the Year for the Riverside County Office of Education. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from the California State University at Long Beach and a Master of Arts degree in educational administration from Chapman University. Hood was a presenter in the session Social Emotional Learning: Infusing It into School Culture to Effect Positive Change in Local Control Accountability Plan/Local Control Funding Formula Priorities of School Climate, Student Engagement, and Student Achievement.



GINGER HOVENIC

Hovenic is Director of Member Relations for the Accrediting Commission for Schools Western Association of Schools and Colleges. She is a distinguished educator who has held various K-12 administrative positions and has received multiple leadership awards including the California School Administrator of the Year by the Association of California School Administrators, the National Distinguished Principal by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the Hart Vision Award presented by the California Network of Educational Charters, and the SONY Creator Award for outstanding achievement using technology. She is an alumna of San Diego State University, California Western University, and the United States International University. Hovenic was a panelist in the session Accreditation for Schools Serving At-Promise Youth.



SHANNON HOVIS

Hovis is a Senior Legislative Assistant to California State Assemblymember Raul Bocanegra, for whom she develops and manages legislation. In that position, she also staffs the Assembly Select Committee on Addressing Out of School, Unemployed Youth. She received a Master of Science degree from Pace University and a Master of Public Policy degree from the University of California at Berkeley. Hovis was a moderator in the panel session New Options and Opportunities Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.



DAVID HURST

Hurst is Deputy Chief Accreditation Officer for AdvancED, the world's largest community of education professionals, where he manages state and regional accreditation services across the United States. A former teacher, principal, and professor, he presents to educators throughout the world. He received a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Tennessee, a Master of Education degree from Arkansas State University, and a Doctor of Education degree from Vanderbilt University. Hurst was a panelist in the session Accreditation for Schools Serving At-Promise Youth.



JESSICA KNEVALS

Knevals is a Principal Consultant in the Accountability and Data Analysis Office at the Colorado Department of Education where she manages policy and data analysis projects associated with the Colorado Education Accountability Act, including production and release of the district and school performance frameworks issued to all districts and schools in Colorado. She received Bachelor of Arts degrees in public affairs and sociology from the Maxwell School of Public Affairs and the College of Arts and Sciences at Syracuse University and a Master in Public and Nonprofit Management and Policy degree from the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at New York University. Knevals was a panelist in the session Alternative Accountability Policy: The Action Is at the State Level.



AMY LANSING

Lansing is Director of the Cognitive and Neurobehavioral Studies in Aggression, Coping, Trauma, and Stress at the University of California at San Diego, and was awarded the CANCER inCYTES Scholar Spotlight Award for her contribution to public health and social justice. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from the University of Texas at Austin, a Master of Arts degree in forensic psychology from John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in clinical psychology from Northwestern University. Lansing was a presenter in the session Do Critically At-Risk Students Suffer From Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?



MATTHEW LAPLANTE

LaPlante is an assistant professor in the Department of Journalism and Communication at the Utah State University and a long-time advocate for providing educational opportunities for underserved Americans. He received a Bachelor of Science degree from Oregon State University and a Master of Education Science degree from the California State University at East Bay. LaPlante was a panelist in the session The County Office View: What a Difference Commitment Makes.



JILL MARKS

Marks is the California State Manager of the Gateway to College National Network and oversees the seven programs and schools in California. She received a Master of Arts degree in history from the University of California at Riverside. Marks was a panelist in the session Recovering Lost Time: Reengaging Students Through College and Community.



PHIL MATERO

Matero is the Founder/Chief Education Officer of YouthBuild Charter School of California, a charter school partnered with 19 YouthBuild programs to provide an education that is rooted in social justice and community action for students who were pushed out of high school. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in comparative literature and a Master of Arts degree in English from California State University at Northridge. Matero was a panelist in the session Over-age, Under-credited Students and Public Charter Schools.



NICK MATHERN

Mathern is Associate Vice President of Policy and Partnership Development for Gateway to College National Network. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology and a Master of Public Administration degree with a focus on education policy. He was a panelist in the session Alternative Accountability Policy: The Action Is at the State Level.



CRAIG MCCLAY

McClay is Advisor of Youth Engagement for America's Promise Alliance. He was a panelist in the session Don't Call Them Dropouts! and provided the closing address Learning from Students: Identifying Effective Interventions.



SUSAN MILLER BARKER

Miller Barker is the Executive Director at the State University of New York Charter Schools Institute responsible for the oversight of Institute operations. She received a Master of Education degree from Harvard University's Graduate School of Education and was awarded the 1999 Edward J. Meade, Jr. Fellowship. Miller Barker presented via video in the session Continuous Improvement: A Look at Two Approaches for Improving Alternative Accountability.



ANDREW O. MOORE

Moore is a Senior Fellow with the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education and Families, a foundation-funded "action tank" that helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Princeton University and a Master of Arts degree from the University of Pennsylvania. Moore was a panelist in the session Reengagement Efforts in San Diego, Chicago, and Beyond: How a Citywide Approach Provides Students a Second Chance.



REBECCA F. (BECKY) PHILLPOTT

Phillpott is the Program Manager of Dropout Prevention for the San Diego Unified School District where she develops and manages targeted intervention programs for students in need of additional support to graduate from high school. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from San Diego State University. Phillpott was a panelist in the session Reengagement Efforts in San Diego, Chicago, and Beyond: How a Citywide Approach Provides Students a Second Chance.



BOB RATH

Rath is the President/Chief Executive Officer of Our Piece of the Pie where he led its transformation into a youth development organization focused on helping urban youth ages 14-24 to become economically independent young adults. He was a presenter in the session Holistic Performance Index and was a panelist in the sessions Over-age, Under-credited Students and Public Charter Schools and A Conversation About Anecdotes and Data.



JENNIFER ROBISON

Robison is the Associate Director of the Education Division for the Buckeye Community Hope Foundation that authorizes 52 charter schools, including eight dropout recovery schools. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Ohio University and a Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Phoenix. Robison was a panelist in the session Continuous Improvement: A Look at Two Approaches for Improving Alternative Accountability.



THOMAS A. SAENZ

Saenz is the President and General Counsel of Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund where he leads the civil rights organization's five offices in pursuing litigation, policy advocacy, and community education to promote the civil rights of Latinos living in the United States. He graduated from Yale College and Yale Law School, and he clerked for two federal judges. Saenz opened the policy forum with a keynote presentation entitled *Education System Accountability Measures for Equity and Excellence*.



ERNIE SILVA

Silva is the Director of External Affairs for SIATech where he works with governmental, business, and community organizations to build support for dropout recovery and to develop an alternative graduation rate for reengaged dropouts. He is a registered lobbyist with the Secretary of State's Office and received a Juris Doctor degree from King Hall at the University of California at Davis School of Law. Silva was a panelist in the session Graduation Rates for Reengaged Dropouts: Politics of Unintended Consequences.



TONY SIMMONS

Simmons is Executive Director of High School for Recording Arts, an independent public charter school in Minnesota. He attended Howard University and Pace University, where he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science, and received a Juris Doctor degree from Rutgers University School of Law. Simmons was a panelist in the sessions Demonstrating Mastery at High School for Recording Arts and Over-age, Under-credited Students and Public Charter Schools.



CAYCEE SLEDGE

Sledge is an Instructional Support Leader for the Office of Education Options in the Chicago Public Schools, which includes programming for students who are court involved, expelled from the district, pregnant and parenting, or reengaged youth. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in computer science and mathematics and Master of Education degree in curriculum and instruction. Sledge was a panelist in the sessions Preparing Great Teachers for At-Promise Students and Reengagement Efforts in San Diego, Chicago, and Beyond: How a Citywide Approach Provides Students a Second Chance.



JUSTIN L. SMITH

Smith is the President/Chief Executive Officer of Pathway 2 Success, Inc. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in computer engineering from the University of Notre Dame. Smith was a panelist in the session Collective Action: From Grassroots to the Capitol.



NELSON SMITH

Smith is Senior Advisor to the National Association of Charter School Authorizers and has served as President and Chief Executive Officer to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. A graduate of Georgetown University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Foreign Service, he earned a Career Achievement Award from New Schools Venture Fund in 2010. Nelson was a panelist in the session A Conversation About Anecdotes and Data.



LESLIE TALBOT

Talbot is the Founder and Principal of Talbot Consulting, an independent education management consulting practice delivering innovative solutions to nonprofit organizations and preK-12 schools. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in public policy from Stanford University and a Master of Arts degree in sociology and education from Teachers College, Columbia University. Talbot was a panelist in the session Continuous Improvement: A Look at Two Approaches for Improving Alternative Accountability.



TRACY TEMPLIN

Templin has held several accountability and strategy roles in the Chicago Public Schools that focus on serving reengaged dropouts and other at-risk students, and was a leading member of the Alternative Accountability Task Force that developed the Option School Quality Rating Policy adopted by the district's Board of Education in 2013. She received a Master of Arts degree from the Johns Hopkins University and a Master of Social Work degree from Washington University. Templin was a panelist in the session Reengagement Efforts in San Diego, Chicago, and Beyond: How a Citywide Approach Provides Students a Second Chance.



MARIA WORTHEN

Worthen is Vice President for Federal and State Policy at the International Association for K-12 Online Learning. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in government and Italian language and literature from Smith College and a Master in Social Work degree from Washington University. Worthen was a panelist in the session Can Online Learning Support Critically At-Risk Students?



NICOLE YOHALEM

Yohalem is the Director of the Road Map Project, Opportunity Youth Initiative, and has worked at the Forum for Youth Investment, leading work on youth engagement, research-practice partnerships, and improving youth program quality. She received her Master of Education degree in risk and prevention from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Yohalem was a panelist in the session Alternative Accountability Policy: The Action Is at the State Level.



KENNETH YOUNG

Young has served as the elected Riverside County Superintendent of Schools since 2007. Preceding his employment in California's public school system, he spent 18 years in the field of civil engineering construction, 14 of them as the president and chief executive officer of a private engineering construction firm. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in business management from the University of Phoenix and a Master of Education degree from the American Intercontinental University. Young was a panelist in the session The County Office View: What a Difference Commitment Makes.



JONATHAN ZAFF

Zaff is the Executive Director of the Center for Promise, the research center of America's Promise Alliance, and a research associate professor in the department of child development and a senior fellow at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University. He received his Doctor of Philosophy degree in lifespan developmental psychology from the University of Georgia. Zaff was a panelist in the session Don't Call Them Dropouts!

Resources

The presentations and materials from the 2014 Alternative Accountability Policy Forum are available online at:

<http://www.alternativeaccountabilityforum.org/2014-event-materials.html>

The published resources below were also mentioned in presentations.

America's Promise Alliance. (2014). *Don't call them dropouts: Understanding the experiences of young people who leave high school before graduation*. America's Promise Alliance Center for Promise at Tufts University. Medford, MA. Retrieved from: http://gradnation.org/sites/default/files/DCTD%20Final%20Full_0.pdf

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Dawson, Linda, Mallory, Kris, and Johnson, Kristel. (2011). A focus on individual student growth. *Leadership*, January-February, pp. 22-26. Association of California School Administrators, Sacramento, CA.

Haynes, Mariana. (2014). *On the path to equity: Improving the effectiveness of beginning teachers*. Alliance for Excellent Education. Washington, D.C. Retrieved from: <http://all4ed.org/reports-factsheets/path-to-equity/>

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Silva, Ernie, and Leigh, Linda. (2012). *2012 Alternative accountability policy forum: Summary and recommendations*. Reaching At Promise Students Association, San Diego, CA. Retrieved from: <http://www.siatech.org/news/pdf/NAPCS-OPP-OverAge-Report-2014.pdf>

