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Summary

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Prepared by

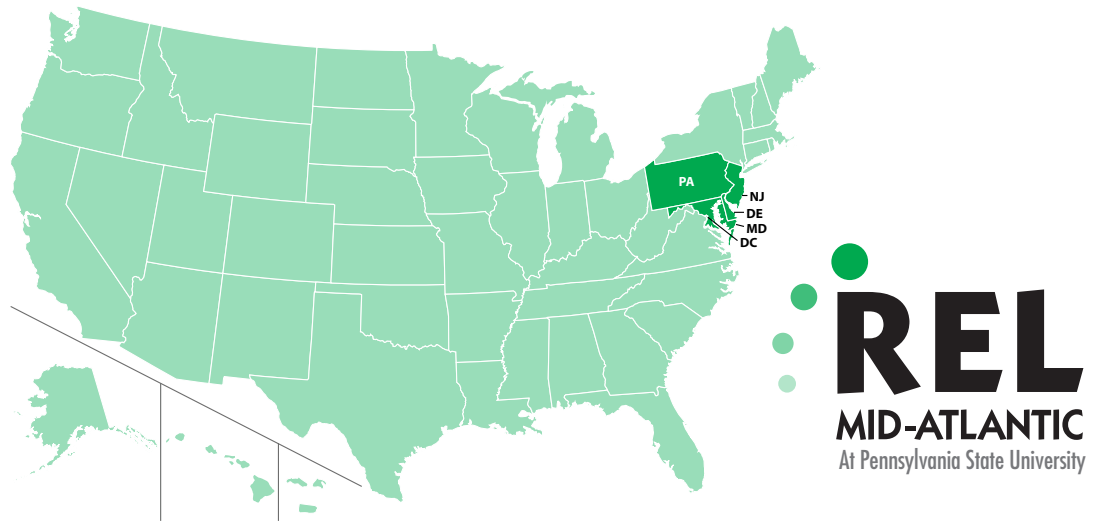
Claudia Burzichelli
Rutgers University

Philip E. Mackey
Rutgers University

Jennifer Bausmith
Rutgers University



Institute of Education Sciences



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This report is available on the regional educational laboratory web site at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

Dropout prevention programs in nine Mid-Atlantic Region school districts: additions to a dropout prevention database

This report describes dropout prevention programs identified by respondents in nine school districts in the Mid-Atlantic Region, along with a searchable database of the programs. The programs expand a database developed in an earlier Northeast and Islands Region study. Only 1 of the 58 identified programs has been reviewed for effectiveness by the What Works Clearinghouse.

Dropping out of high school is a serious concern. It is associated with numerous harmful effects for dropouts and their communities. There is evidence that some dropout prevention programs and policies are effective, but those in use in the Mid-Atlantic Region have not been documented.

The current study replicates work of Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northeast and Islands. It describes dropout prevention programs in nine Mid-Atlantic Region (Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania) school districts serving communities with populations of 24,742–107,250 (as of July 2008). All nine districts have high dropout rates, large racial/ethnic minority student populations, and high percentages of students from households living below the poverty line. The study is driven by two research questions:

- What are the characteristics of dropout prevention programs and policies in the nine districts?
- Which programs have been reviewed by the U.S. Department of Education’s What Works Clearinghouse, and what were its findings?

The study found that:

- No district reported dropout prevention policies apart from those establishing the reported programs.
- Only one program model was reported by more than one district. Because the program was funded and implemented differently in the two districts that reported it, it is treated as two programs.
- The most common core strategies were advocating for student needs (64 percent of programs), engaging and supporting families (57 percent), and monitoring school attendance (53 percent).
- The most common service goals were to improve academic performance (95 percent of programs), decrease truancy (66 percent), and provide support during transitions (60 percent).

- The most common student subgroups targeted were students with academic needs (90 percent of programs), students from low socioeconomic status families (60 percent), and special needs students with behavioral challenges (57 percent).
- Programs that targeted specific grades were most likely to focus on students in grades 9 or 12.
- Teachers were involved in 86 percent of reported programs, guidance counselors in 78 percent, and principals or other administrators in 67 percent.
- The most common forms of community involvement engaged parents (69 percent of programs), youth or social services staff (28 percent), mental health services staff (28 percent), police (22 percent), and mentoring program staff (21 percent). Twelve programs (21 percent) reported no community involvement.
- Districts funded all or part of 79 percent of reported programs; state governments had some financial role in 41 percent, the federal government in 26 percent, and private sources in 7 percent. Four programs (7 percent) did not report a funding source.
- As of May 1, 2010, only 1 of the 58 programs—Talent Development High Schools—had been reviewed by the What Works Clearinghouse, which found only one small study that met its evidence standards with reservations.

The results of this study were added to the REL Northeast and Islands database of dropout prevention programs. The database documents local use of dropout prevention programs and indicates which of the reported programs have been reviewed by the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse. It enables school administrators to identify districts with programs like their own, programs targeting specific student groups, and programs employing core strategies they might want to investigate. The database provides information that could lead to cross-district collaboration in grant seeking or on joint programs with institutions of higher education and other regional institutions and agencies. It will be updated and expanded periodically and can be accessed at www.relnei.org/research.educational.dropoutdb.php. See box 2 in the main report for a basic guide to using the database and appendix A in Myint-U et al. (2008, revised 2009) for the complete users guide.

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