

Preface

Every day there are students who leave school before they graduate—never to return. Others leave and then come back, eventually completing school, but in a less than efficient and satisfying manner. Failure to graduate—dropping out—is a problem that has been around for many years. It has been a blip on the radar screen, emerging only every so often as people become concerned about whether our country is losing valuable resources when students do not complete school.

Perhaps more than ever before, the current context of educational reform in the United States has alerted the country to the importance of having all students graduate from high school with a diploma. This press toward “graduation for all” has to do with wanting an educated citizenry—one that contributes to, rather than burdens, our economy.

Recent federal legislation has focused attention on the problem of too many students dropping out of school and is a driving force in efforts to increase the rate of graduation for all students. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) holds schools accountable for student progress using indicators of adequate yearly progress (AYP) that include not only measures of academic performance but also graduation rates. Employers today are no longer willing to hire youth who do not have the skills that they are supposed to learn in high school. And, society cannot afford to support the costs of lost revenue, welfare, unemployment, crime prevention, criminal proceedings, and incarceration often associated with students who drop out of school.

We wrote this book with the desire to provide information that will help reach the goal of graduation for all. We have developed a practical guide that we believe will aid in decreasing the rate of school dropouts, and at the same time increase the graduation rate.

AUDIENCE

Educators, administrators, and policymakers at district and state levels are on the front line in the fight to promote graduation for all. We have written this book to be a resource to all district and school professionals developing prevention and intervention programs to decrease dropout and increase graduation. The book is also appropriate for teams of individuals that may include principals, teachers, counselors, school psychologists, curriculum specialists, attendance coordinators, directors of special services, educators and coordinators of alternative schools, assistant superintendents and superintendents.

We believe that the book also will be useful to several other audiences. For example, teachers-in-training will gain much from this book because working with students at risk is part of the job. Similarly, we believe that it will be of benefit to personnel from state-level education agencies who assist with and facilitate the development and implementation of systemic interventions that will effectively improve graduation rates. Other professionals who work with school, district, and state-level teams also will benefit from this book, including, for example, court liaisons, community agency personnel (YMCA, mental health clinics, organizations focused on pregnancy and parenting), and other business organizations (those that may assist with service learning projects or mentoring projects). The book also is useful for parents and parent organizations seeking to determine what schools can do for their children.

OVERVIEW

We have organized this book to give you both the information that you need to understand the topic and the tools that you need to take action. In each chapter, readers are provided with both “knowing” and “doing” information. Reflection Questions in each chapter are provided to help you think deeply about some of the knowledge information that is provided. But, because the dropout problem is not just something to be admired, this book is rich in tools—tools that you can use to help you take action to deal with the dropout problem in the context of your own school, your child’s school, or a school you will be in someday. These are Action Tools.

Each chapter is organized in a way that makes it easy for you to attend to information that is important to you—advanced organizers that list the topics in the chapter and the things that you will learn from the chapter—as well as a Summary to provide a quick review of the main points in the chapter. Further Readings are provided with each chapter, which include key references as well as sources of additional information and additional readings should you want to dig deeper than was possible in the chapter in this book.

Finally, we have included three key appendices. One is a Directory of Action Tools that allows you to see a listing of them at a glance in one place. Another is a Selected Glossary of terms—those terms that are used in this book and that everyone should use in the same way. The third, Related Links, is a list of Web sites and other resources that address dropout prevention and closely related topics.

We believe that we have developed a book that will help you attack the dropout problem. We firmly believe that to do so, you need both information and tools with which to work. We have provided these for you here. We hope that as you use this book, you will provide us with feedback on its usefulness in addressing the dropout problem and in increasing graduation for all in your school or district.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is based on the accumulated knowledge of years of research and practice at the University of Minnesota and schools throughout this state and elsewhere. We could not have completed this book without the influence of many people and events. We are particularly grateful for the support of our colleagues, Sandra

Christenson and David Johnson, who encouraged the three of us to prepare a book that would speak to practitioners and provide them with tools to reach the goal of graduation for all. We would like to acknowledge the expertise of these two individuals, as well as another colleague, Mary Sinclair, and others, who have shaped our thinking on the issue of dropout in the past and currently.

We also owe a debt of gratitude to the many individuals who spoke to us over the phone and in person about their district and state approaches to dropout prevention—about where things were and were not working, and about what the major issues were that needed to be addressed. There are too many people to list, but we want all to know that in some way or another, all of their comments were mulled over, thought about, digested, and reflected in this book.

There are several individuals whose help we want specifically to acknowledge. First, we would like to thank Sylvie Hale at WestEd for allowing us to model the Action Tools in this book on a format used in her book on comprehensive school reform. Lori Anderson assisted with formatting many of the tools with quick turnaround and helpful suggestions. Two key staff from the Minneapolis Public Schools reviewed and provided feedback on many of the tools to make sure that they were workable in the school setting. These individuals included Mary Barrie and Michael Luseni. To each of these individuals we owe a large debt of gratitude.

In addition, we would like to thank several individuals who reviewed the book. The valuable contributions and thoughtful comments of the following reviewers were greatly appreciated.

Elaine Allensworth, Associate Director, Consortium on Chicago School Research
University of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Nancy Avolese, State Coordinator, Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth
Pennsylvania Department of Education, Harrisburg, PA

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We hope that the approval reflected by the reviewers carries over to you the reader. That is our true goal—to meet your needs, and in meeting your needs to have an impact on the dropout rate and, in turn, to strive toward graduation for all in our schools.

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Martha L. Thurlow