Graduate Maryland is an initiative spearheaded by Advocates for Children and Youth that aims to tackle many of the causes of dropping out of school. Through our Graduate Maryland initiative, best practices are identified, policies are discussed, and recommendations are made to galvanize supporters to actively help more Maryland students earn their high school diploma.

**WHY GRADUATE MARYLAND?**

In 2012, the Maryland General Assembly passed Senate Bill 362 which increased the compulsory school age from 16 to 18. This increase means that a student must continue to be enrolled in school and cannot legally drop out until their 18th birthday. If a student does dropout prior to turning 18, they and their parents could face legal penalties. The compulsory school age will be increased from 16 to 17 years of age beginning July 1, 2015 and from 17 to 18 on July 1, 2017.¹

While the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the local school systems are committed to helping more students reach graduation, their focus is often on the academic factors involved in long-term academic success. Major initiatives are underway which include the creation of improved standards such as Common Core, a new assessment of college and career readiness known as Partnership to Assess Readiness of College and Career (PARCC), and the effort to evaluate the performance of teachers. These initiatives may set us on a path to improving student achievement. These efforts do not address many of the reasons why a student decides to drop out.

Advocates for Children and Youth established the Graduate Maryland initiative to support the implementation of the compulsory school age law while adding a new dimension to the approach. Graduate Maryland focuses on other critical factors that can hinder or derail graduation. It is not enough to limit school improvement efforts to academic content and delivery. The discussion must include improving the school environment, increasing support services, and providing adequate funding to keep students on track to graduate.

As such, Graduate Maryland focuses on measures that MSDE, local school systems, parents, and social service providers can use to address the myriad of issues which could hinder students from earning their diplomas.

**HOW DO WE GRADUATE MARYLAND?**

Increasing graduation rates in Maryland is possible. It will take adequate funding and continued collaboration among those who work with or on behalf of Maryland’s students. This Graduate Maryland report serves as a guiding document for stakeholders who will develop an advocacy agenda based on the recommended policies in this document.

Graduate Maryland is one of the necessary and important steps to ensuring that students are well-positioned to succeed.
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On every school day in Maryland, the Class of 2013 lost an average of 8.6 high school students due to dropping out. All told, 6,192 students did not officially graduate. This number could be higher as it did not take into account students who had unofficially dropped out of school.

Although each student has the responsibility to meet graduation requirements, for some students there were often insurmountable obstacles that were beyond their control. In some cases, these students were not getting the support or additional care needed to be successful.

Our data gathering revealed the causes for dropping out. These causes were categorized into four major issue areas. These areas were (1) Prevention and Early Interventions, (2) Social Support Services, (3) GED Preparation, and (4) Alternative Programs and Approaches.

Although these causes were identified, it would take a collaborative effort to affect change. Hence, the Graduate Maryland initiative was born. Graduate Maryland is a convening of students, parents, schools, community-based organizations, business leaders, and private providers of various educational programs.

At the first meeting in May 2013, Graduate Maryland participants were divided into four work groups to develop recommendations and identify effective approaches to better reach the most challenged students. This work continued later in the summer as Advocates for Children and Youth continued to rally our partners to further develop the recommendations.

Both the Early Interventions/Prevention and Support Services workgroups conducted more research and refined their recommendations now included in this report. The Alternative Programs workgroup reviewed successful alternative programs and laid critical groundwork for developing specific policies. Finally, the GED workgroup surveyed students and preparation program providers from across the state and developed recommendations that reflected the priorities and needs of students and providers. See the recommendations for each workgroup in the boxed graph on the next page entitled, "Recommendations: How to Improve Graduation Rates in Maryland"
These recommendations are strong. A commitment from local and state government as well as school systems to identify new resources and use current dollars to fund these recommendations is critical. Adequate funding will support the programs and enhancements needed to help more of Maryland’s students graduate.

Advocates for Children and Youth, along with our many partners in the Graduate Maryland initiative, will be developing a short-term and long-term policy reform agenda based on these recommendations. Resource and policy changes will be a necessary step to moving forward. The General Assembly, Maryland State Department of Education, and local school systems are committed to implementing the new compulsory school age law to help more students graduate. Advocates for Children and Youth and its allies will be there to collaborate with the goal of improving Maryland’s high school graduation rates.
HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS IN MARYLAND

Maryland has one of the best educational systems in the country and is wealthier than most states. Despite these facts, Maryland still struggles to get every kid in a cap and gown. In fact, in the Class of 2013, an average of 8.6 students dropped out of high school every day in Maryland.

Only 85 percent of the Maryland Class of 2013 graduated within four years. In other words, 15 percent—or almost 10,000 students in the Class of 2013—were unable to graduate on-time or graduate at all. While some counties in Maryland have graduation rates over 90 percent, such as Worcester County, others such as Baltimore City barely graduate 70 percent of their students.

These overall numbers are troubling. What is also concerning is that students of color, students with disabilities, and students with Limited English Proficiency (also known as English language learners) are more likely to drop out than their peers.

IMPACT ON HEALTH, INCOME, AND ECONOMY

The outcomes for individuals lacking a high school diploma are staggering. High school dropouts earn $9,486 less a year than those with at least a high school degree. Factoring in the difference between the earnings of an individual without a high school diploma and those of an individual with a degree from a four year college, this gap in earnings dramatically increases. High school dropouts earn over $1 million less over a lifetime than those with four-year degree.

Maryland dropouts from the Class of 2011 alone have contributed to over an estimated $3 billion in lost earnings across the state. Nationally, there will be $330 billion in lost wages from one class of dropouts. Students who drop out of high school are also more likely to be incarcerated and will cost taxpayers more than $300,000 each in incarceration costs and lost taxes.

In addition to lower earnings and an increased likelihood of experiencing unemployment, high school dropouts before the advent of the Affordable Care Act were nearly twice as likely to lack health care coverage than their peers with a high school diploma and were more than five times as likely to be uninsured than those with a Bachelor’s degree.

RESEARCH

In order to develop these recommendations, the life and educational context of these youth at risk of dropping out needed to be understood. In seeking answers, several questions were asked based on the “who”, “what”, “why”, “when” and “where” of these students. When did they fall off track? Why did they choose to dropout? What could have kept them in school?
In the initial research for this work, Advocates for Children and Youth reviewed the literature for causes of dropping out, examined the best practices for keeping children engaged in school, and spoke with education stakeholders all over the state. This research led to the categorization of the causes into four key areas:

- **Early Intervention/Prevention**
- **Support Services**
- **GED Preparation**
- **Alternative Approaches and Programs**

While there are many approaches to help kids stay in school, these four areas call attention not only to the key barriers students face as they pursue their education, but also to effective approaches for better reaching these most challenged students.

**GRADUATE MARYLAND INITIATIVE**

On May 2, 2013, Advocates for Children and Youth brought together students, parents, schools, community-based organizations, business leaders, and private providers of various educational programs from across the state to highlight the dropout crisis and the need for change. This convening was the official start of the Graduate Maryland Initiative.

The event featured prominent speakers from across the state and country who testified to the importance of addressing the dropout issue. Throughout the day, the participants heard from Maryland State Senator Catherine Pugh, Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) School Completion and Alternative Programs Specialist Robert Murphy and nationally renowned Johns Hopkins University researcher Dr. Robert Balfanz.

Participants were shown a clip of the PBS documentary *180 Days* that further put the dropout crisis in perspective. In addition, there was a panel of stakeholders who profiled the challenges of youth who are at risk of dropping out and suggested possible ways of stemming the dropout rate.

Ready to begin making positive change, participants formed into workgroups on the four key research areas. The workgroups discussed initial recommendations, conducted a gap analysis, and planned to reconvene after the kick-off meeting to continue work in their focus areas.
Advocates for Children and Youth categorized the reasons why students drop out into four key areas. The convening of Graduate Maryland resulted in several recommendations in each of these area. These recommendations are detailed throughout this report.

The road to dropping out begins before entering high school. There are factors that could hinder a student from graduating that can be addressed early in a student's educational career. These factors and the corresponding solutions are addressed in the Prevention and Early Intervention category. Below are three recommendations that will help identify problems before they become insurmountable so that children are better prepared for academic success.

**INCREASE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY PRE-KINDERGARTEN**

The benefits of early childhood education (ECE) have been proven far and wide. Leaders of businesses as diverse as UPS, Macy’s, and PNC Bank have advocated for increasing support for early childhood programs. ECE yields academic and economic benefits to both the child and to society. These benefits include improved reading ability, as well as an increased likelihood of graduating and finding a job as an adult. Studies have repeatedly shown that children from across the socio-economic spectrum experience significant benefits, especially children of working class and middle-income families. An interesting and concerning fact is that many middle class families have far less access to quality pre-school than either their low-income or most affluent peers.

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**Maryland Pre-K and Head Start Enrollment as Percentage of Total Population**

*This is an estimate of children in special education who are not enrolled in state-funded pre-K or Head Start.

Source: NIEER
Maryland currently has many early childhood programs and funding streams, including evidence-based home visiting, Head Start, Early Head Start, child care subsidies, and parent education programs among others. While these are vital programs, particularly for low-income children, one program in particular has the political support to grow. Maryland is on the cusp of extending high-quality pre-kindergarten to more four year olds.

The state currently mandates that public pre-kindergarten be made available to children eligible for free and reduced lunch. Once the mandate has been met, local jurisdictions may offer pre-kindergarten to other children deemed to be at-risk for lack of school readiness, specifically English-language learners and children with developmental delays or other special needs.

Pre-kindergarten is vital for all children and currently only very low-income kids and children with disabilities are guaranteed access. In 2013, 27,500 Maryland four year olds (37 percent of the total four year old population) were enrolled in public pre-kindergarten. Of that number, 86 percent were from income-eligible families.15

In 2006, a legislatively-mandated task force was created to look at the possibility of expanding access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs. Task force members included the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and a wide-range of public and private stakeholders. Once the task force completed its work, the Maryland State Board of Education made additional recommendations and a bill passed the General Assembly requiring MSDE to finalize a business plan in consultation with school superintendents and local governing bodies.16

Due to the recession, the Preschool for All Business Plan was never enacted. Many children and families still lack access to high-quality pre-kindergarten. Now that Maryland has once again found its economic footing, it is time to make the plan’s recommendations a reality.

RECOMMENDATION:

➔ Implement the Maryland Pre-School for All Business Plan
  • Increase access to pre-K for children who are up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level and develop strategies to reach universal pre-k access
  • Identify potential funding mechanisms
  • Ensure that current quality improvement work led by MSDE aligns with pre-k expansion

TAKEAWAY:
Maryland’s children need the best possible start and that means there must be an investment in programs that work. Polls show that four out of five Marylanders believe it’s important to expand pre-kindergarten access to all children whose parents choose to enroll them.17 Now is the time to make a commitment to our youngest learners and set them on a path to academic success.
ESTABLISH EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

Early Warning Systems (EWS) have become a great avenue for using data to identify students or cohorts of students that are at-risk of dropping out or falling behind in their academics. Districts and state departments of education across the country now have the technical ability to track different types of data such as student grades, attendance, and disciplinary infractions.

Many, including the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), have been working on an EWS that is able to take this data and create an opportunity for schools to be notified when a student or cohort may require intervention services. For instance, students that receive more than one failing grade and have been suspended at any age face a much greater risk of dropping out. An EWS can be used to alert a school administrator, counselor, or teacher that a particular student is in need of intervention based on a set of indicators like failing grades and chronic absence. Montgomery County actually released a study based on information from its EWS which found that the potential for dropping out can be identified using data as early as first grade.¹⁸

TAKEAWAY:

MSDE and several school districts in Maryland are using short-term grants to implement Early Warning Systems. Data and technology must be funded adequately and utilized to identify at-risk students and improve their educational experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

➢ Allocate additional resources to develop a statewide Early Warning System (EWS) that can track the needs and progress of local school systems

➢ Support school districts and individual schools in the building of their own EWS to help identify individual students that are in need of interventions

➢ Build EWS and referral systems that can identify and recommend locally available supports and interventions

➢ Develop the technology and establish the data sharing agreements necessary for the educational data system to ‘talk to’ the data systems of other relevant child serving agencies

➢ Provide on-going technical assistance to local school districts and individual schools to keep current with best practices
IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND MINIMIZE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Chronic absenteeism is a critical issue facing schools and communities, as over 81,000 of Maryland students had 20 or more absences in the 2011-2012 school year. This number of absences affects the student's ability to learn as formal learning is a sequenced-based practice in which a new concept's introduction is often based upon a previous lesson. Missing school or a class can cause an information gap and when compounded with missing multiple days, causes a child to fall further behind. Chronic absences—excused or unexcused—cause students to become disengaged in school. These absences also increase the likelihood that the student will fall behind in their academics and will have to repeat a grade.

In 2013, the Maryland General Assembly passed House Bill 207, which requires each local school system to implement a plan of intervention for any student unlawfully absent for more than 10 percent of the school year at any point. Any student in K-12 who misses more than 8 days in a quarter, 15 days in a semester or 20 days in a school year must be referred immediately for active intervention under the system's plan. This approach shows that Maryland is on the right path to decreasing chronic absence. However, additional resources are needed to improve the level of intervention. To demonstrate the extent of the problem, the graphs below show the level of absenteeism in Maryland schools and then the correlation between attendance and graduation rates of ninth graders in Baltimore City Schools.
TAKEAWAY:

Policymakers and education stakeholders must continue to support local school systems by helping identify innovative and proven ways to get all children in the classroom and learning.
Students that struggle in school often have non-academic barriers to success due to personal challenges or complications at home. While school systems cannot solve every problem, there are proactive steps that districts and schools can take to resolve or minimize these issues that will help increase the likelihood of academic success.

Below are three recommendations for social support services. While not an exhaustive list, the recommendations represent concrete opportunities for schools to help ameliorate barriers to student achievement.

**INCREASE ACCESS TO SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

Mental health needs of students are largely unmet. A national study showed that only about half (50.6 percent) of youth with a diagnosable mental disorder between the ages of 8-15 years old received treatment in the past year. Each year approximately 50 percent of students who are coded in special education with an emotional disability drop out. The number of non-special education students that drop out due to a mental health issue or problems at home is a difficult number to obtain, but advocates consistently hear about these barriers from the experiences of students, schools, and providers.

**Mental Health Issues Facing Students**

- Self-esteem
- Depression
- Physical/emotional abuse at home
- Bullying on and/or off school grounds
- Drug/alcohol abuse
- Overlooked or misidentified developmental or emotional disabilities
- Parenthood
- LGBT (coming out issues)
- Family dysfunction
- Grief
- Unhealthy stress

Mental health services can be challenging for working families to access and many kids seek care at school if it is available. According to the University of Maryland Center for School Mental Health, almost 80 percent of children and adolescents who receive mental health services access services in the school setting and approximately 96 percent of children follow through with school mental health services after the initial referral. Only 13 percent of children follow through with referrals to community mental health centers. School-based mental health services are one effective and efficient way to address the struggles of youth with mental health issues.
In addition to creating the opportunity for early identification and accessible care, school-based mental health services also promote a positive school climate that benefits all students. For example, comprehensive school mental health services have been shown to lead to:

- Decreased student behavioral and emotional problems
- Improved school performance
- Improved personal relationships
- Increased job satisfaction for school personnel
- Enhanced parent and family involvement in schools
- Decreased student engagement in risky behaviors

The most promising model for addressing the mental health needs of students is to develop a continuum of school-based mental health services. This model involves schools contracting with community mental health providers to come into schools to supplement and enhance the limited number of school-employed mental health providers, such as school psychologists, social workers and counselors.

The advantages of the school-based mental health continuum model are many. Community mental health professionals can:

- Provide a broader continuum of services to supplement school-employed staff services
- Offer mental health services to students who are not in special education
- Provide preventive care such as screening, identification, and brief intervention in order to reduce unnecessary, expensive intensive care
- Facilitate connections and referral pathways to community providers for more intensive and specialized services to prevent the over-utilization of expensive, intensive medical and psychiatric services such as inpatient hospitalizations
Another access point for mental health services is through School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs). These centers often operate independently of the school and depending on the configuration, can be used for both physical and mental health services. Some SBHCs are financially self-sustaining with the support of grants and funding from Medicaid and private insurance.

One advantage to the schools is that there is no need to develop a billing system as both school-based mental health models and SBHCs bill Medicaid or a child’s insurance directly. In addition, this model allows for a more streamlined referral system to an outside network of community-based providers for problems that cannot be handled on-site.

TAKEAWAY:
There is a need for more mental health services to help decrease the drop-out rate of youth with mental health concerns and disabilities. The school-based mental health model must be supported as it is the fiscally responsible way to provide mental health services that benefit students.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Promote the inclusion of community mental health organizations in school-based mental health continuum
- Develop state and district-level policies that encourage partnerships, support contracting with private providers for mental health services, and create a mental health continuum of support
- Allocate funding for school-based mental health services
EXPAND SCHOOLS’ REFERRAL NETWORKS

Some students will face non-academic barriers which hinder academic success such as homelessness and mental health issues. In the case of Maryland’s schools, there are school counselors, nurses and vice principals with connections to particular providers in their given areas that can provide the additional support that a student may need. However, it appears that there are no systematic and consistent referrals to community-based providers to address the student’s social, emotional, and basic needs.

Referrals should be readily available so that students and families can easily access help to directly address issues that can complicate their educational progress. The Referral System Flow Chart outlines the process for a more systematic referral system.

There are great resources that schools and districts can tap into when referring students and families to community providers. Maryland 211 is a website and phone referral service which offers information on human service providers. The 211 website allows anyone to conduct a customized search for services. A similar website, www.ourfootsteps.org, focuses on the needs of teens and provides referral options on a range of topics such as suicide prevention, housing, food, and counseling. In addition, www.marylandsail.org provides families with the ability to apply online for a range of public benefits, such as housing and health assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Assign a designated staff at the school and district level to coordinate efforts to refer students to community providers
- Provide training on the referral system and how to effectively use referral websites
- Provide a list of referral search engines and their given utility
- Maintain an annually-updated list of local services that is matched to student needs

TAKEAWAY:

A student referral network is not difficult to create. A customized referral plan for each district must be implemented to improve the accessibility and utilization of these support services. Students who access these supports tend to have better attendance and improved behavior which improves their likelihood of graduating.
ENSURE SAFE, CONSISTENT, AND ADEQUATE TRANSPORTATION

A key barrier to students arriving to school on-time or showing up at all is a lack of safe, adequate, and/or timely transportation. Problems related to transportation vary widely across Maryland. Students in many rural communities have difficulty accessing transportation due to the remoteness of their home, complications due to inclement weather, and a lack of public transit.²⁷

Students in Baltimore City rely on public transit which incurs a host of problems. A Student School Stability Work Group in Baltimore found that bus delays were very common—up to three times a week for many children.²⁸ Anecdotally, the workgroup discovered that transportation was a particular challenge for highly mobile students, including those who are homeless and in foster care. These students often had no choice but to walk an unsafe route to ride the closest bus to get to their new home placement or temporary residence. Many end up having to use public transportation, which is not available in many areas, or rely on friends or relatives despite transportation being required by state and federal law.

Transportation is mostly a local issue which often requires local solutions. In addition, there are particular instances when a transportation plan on a given day does not work as intended. No student should have to consistently miss or be tardy due to problems with transportation.

In order to find creative solutions, a student transportation bill of rights was recommended to help ensure consistent transportation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Ensure consistent and safe buses, bus stops, and walking routes
- Create a weather and delay alert system using similar technology to many public transportation companies
- Ensure that transportation plans meet the needs of homeless students
- Develop a contingency plan for students who lose bus privileges due to a major infraction
- Confirm that each student who uses public transportation to get to school has a current bus pass and that the routes are timely and safe

TAKEAWAY:

Transportation is a complicated issue with no easy solutions. However, these recommendations can serve as a guide to districts as they develop regular and contingency plans to ensure that no student misses school because of transportation challenges.
One of the most beneficial aspects of taking the General Education Development test (GED) in Maryland is that students earn more than just a high school equivalency certificate when they pass the test; they earn a Maryland High School Diploma awarded to them by the State Board of Education.

As the Maryland Compulsory School Age Law goes into effect, it is expected that more students will choose to take the GED as an alternative to completing high school. In January 2014, the GED test changed nationwide. Maryland students will continue to have the opportunity to earn a high school diploma; however, the new examination will test for more in-depth content knowledge (based on Common Core Standards) and is only offered online.

In order to better understand the needs and experiences of test-takers, prep providers and test administrators, Advocates for Children and Youth created an online survey that was distributed to stakeholders in all 24 of Maryland’s jurisdictions. The survey asked questions regarding the:

- Perceived effectiveness of preparation programs
- Factors necessary to improve preparation programs
- Existing GED test registration process and scoring timeline
- Concerns among stakeholders about the new GED test
- Test preparation supports for the new test

For the GED to continue to be one of many pathways to a diploma for Maryland’s students, preparatory programs should be strengthened and access to the new GED test should be improved. Survey results as well as discussions with students, providers, and the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation revealed four enhancements which serve as recommendations for improvement.
RECOMMENDATIONS:

→ Expand GED test preparation and education opportunities for providers by:
  • Increasing resources for prep programs
  • Preparing students for the test's more rigorous content by increasing the amount of class time offered by preparation programs
  • Ensuring access to preparation programs by increasing the number of programs and programs locations, especially in rural areas
  • Mitigating financial barriers for test-takers, including financial barriers for taking preparation courses, accessing prep materials and paying for the cost of the new test

→ Ensure that GED preparation programs can effectively help students prepare for the new test by:
  • Providing ongoing, robust training for prep providers on the content knowledge, processes and computer skills necessary for the new test including training on Common Core
  • Increasing computer access within preparation programs
  • Providing prep providers with access to effective curriculum and instructional materials that are aligned to the new test

→ Keep the student cost of the exam low and preferably at or near $45 by budgeting necessary resources

→ Determine whether a student can enroll in a prep program in lieu of school
  • Revisiting this issue to ensure that the GED route is not cut-off from students that can benefit from the test and the prep programs

TAKEAWAY:
The GED is a good alternative for students who did not graduate from high school. However, as the new GED test is implemented, consideration must be given to increasing its accessibility and providing adequate test preparation supports for potential GED candidates.
An important component to dropout prevention is to understand the student’s academic and non-academic needs. Many students excel in a traditional classroom environment. However, there are a significant number of students—particularly of high school age—that need an alternative option. There should be multiple learning environments that meet the diverse range of learning styles and circumstances that older students require. The goal of having these alternatives available is to keep students engaged in learning.

In the context of this report, alternative programs are not necessarily the standard “alternative school” that is often available in most school districts. Effective utilization of such schools ranges widely and many do not offer alternative school structures in relation to curriculum, schedules, and teaching techniques that many students need. In other words, there is not much of a difference between a traditional school and an “alternative school”.

However, there are examples of standard alternative schools doing a great job working with students in ways that provide the individualized learning and approach some students need to succeed academically. This section will highlight key components of these effective programs that were identified in a national review of alternative schools.

FUNDING WHAT WORKS
Not all alternative programs have been successful. In addition, some alternative approaches will not work with all populations in all districts. The key is being open to the idea of options and being willing to pull support or funding from programs that are not clearly increasing student achievement.

SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM ELEMENTS
There are many characteristics of successful programs that have helped students achieve favorable results. Below are highlights of those characteristics that should be present in any alternative program or school.

- Personalized academic instruction and/or some level of self-pace
- Non-traditional hours
- Use of technology
- Focus on career development and connection to jobs
- Strong community partnerships with nonprofits and providers
- Blended private and public funding
- Wrap-around supports and an emphasis on addressing individual barriers
Not all programs will look the same and not all potential dropouts will benefit from the same programs. Some programs are best administered in an alternative environment while others are better suited for a more traditional setting. Whatever the environment, the program should provide greater options and flexibility to student learning. Program characteristics include:

- Ability to earn a diploma from the student's home school while attending an alternative program
- Opportunities to earn credit through community-based learning opportunities
- Emphasis on students that are over 18 years of age and lack enough credits to graduate
- Provision for GED prep courses
- Substantive focus on behavioral issues and social-emotional development

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS AND APPROACHES

**School for Integrated Academics and Technologies**

**What Is It:**
The School for Integrated Academics and Technologies (SIA Tech) is a network of public charter high schools with campuses nationwide. The program re-engages students that have or are about to drop out through an innovative, personalized curriculum that integrates technology with academics and provides the opportunity to earn a high school diploma.

**Where Is It:**
SIA Tech operates 14 programs in urban settings across 5 states.

**How Does it Help Create More Graduates:**
Students participating in SIA Tech saw a 50 percent gain in math assessment scores and a 38 percent increase in English/language arts assessment scores.

**Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection**

**What Is It:**
Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection, an affiliate of Hillside Family of Agencies, is a youth development program which aims to increase graduation rates and prepare students to enter college or the workplace, post-graduation. The program provides a holistic support system to youth that qualify for entry into the program. Entry is dependent on meeting at least two of six risk factors. Wrap-around services include long-term advocacy, academic resources, life skills development, and job training. Students enroll in the program in seventh through ninth grade with continued support for up to two years post graduation.

**Where Is It:**
Hillside operates in New York State and in Prince George's County, Maryland.

**How Does it Help Create More Graduates:**
In Prince George's County, this approach resulted in 91 percent of participants graduating versus 74 percent of the general student population.

NEXT STEPS

The Alternative Programs workgroup will continue to look at the options available throughout Maryland. Based on the findings, recommendations will be made. The goal will be to propose learning environments that allow for innovation so that students can reach their greatest potential and graduate.
High school graduation should not only be the concern of students, but also of legislators, school administrators, and the public. Better preparing our students to be strong contributors to the economy is a statewide priority. It will take a comprehensive implementation strategy to increase Maryland’s graduation rates.

It is important to address the quality of instruction and academic. It is also necessary to focus on other barriers that hinder or prevent scholastic success. Some of the 6,192 high school drop outs in the Class of 2013—not to mention the others who were not officially classified as such—were not getting the support they needed to handle circumstances that were beyond their control.

Many of these recommendations come with a price tag. A commitment from local and state government as well as schools to identify new resources and to use current dollars more efficiently is critical. Doing things the same way in terms of programming and funding will not allow struggling students to flourish.

NEXT STEPS FOR GRADUATE MARYLAND
Advocates for Children and Youth along with our many partners in the Graduate Maryland initiative will be developing short-term and long-term agendas based on these recommendations. Resources, policy changes, and improvements are necessary components of moving forward. The General Assembly, MSDE and local school systems are committed to implementing the new compulsory school age law to help more students graduate. Advocates for Children and Youth is prepared to collaborate with legislators and school systems to make that happen. Now is the time to act. Every year of delay means another cohort of high school dropouts.

To stay engaged in the advocacy efforts, visit our website at www.acy.org for updates. Please join the Graduate Maryland effort.


4. Daily dropout rate calculated by using the number of school days over four years divided by the number of dropouts over the same period. Number of dropouts comes from the 2012 Maryland Report Card. www.mdreportcard.org.


Advocates for Children and Youth thanks the Abell Foundation for funding Graduate Maryland. Without your continued support, our work would not be possible.

We would also like to thank all the stakeholders who gave their time and insight to this process.