



Succeed in PA
PENNSYLVANIA DROPOUT PREVENTION NETWORK

dropout prevention summit report

report to the commonwealth and post summit action plan



This report is provided by the Pennsylvania Dropout Prevention Network and Communities In Schools of Pennsylvania through generous funding from The Walmart Foundation.

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history of the pennsylvania dropout prevention network

The Pennsylvania Dropout Prevention Network (PaDPN) was formed in early 2012 as a collaborative of state-wide partners engaged in understanding the systemic causes and impacts of school dropout. With an understanding that nearly 20% of Pennsylvania's students fail to graduate on time with a regular diploma and that over 14,700 students dropped out of school in 2011-2012 the PaDPN recognizes that as a Commonwealth we face a crisis that affects many sectors of public interest and detrimentally impacts the individual lives of students and families in all regions of Pennsylvania.

Participation in the PaDPN represents many sectors of government, social and public welfare, economy, business, human services, education, juvenile justice, corrections, and community-school partnerships. Our founding leadership is co-chaired by Judge Dwayne Woodruff of the Allegheny Courts and Secretary Beverly Mackereth of the PA Department of Public Welfare. Initial funding for the PaDPN is supported by the Walmart Foundation.

Through the participation of our founding advisory board and the lead agency of the PaDPN, Communities In Schools of Pennsylvania, a series of webinars was provided to stakeholders across sectors and geographic regions of the Commonwealth. These webinars included presentations from the PA Department of Education, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, and the PA Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children Youth and Families. These trainings set the stage for a culminating event in the first PaDPN Dropout Prevention Summit, held in Harrisburg, PA on May 2, 2013. Over 700 partners have attended the combined webinar events and the summit, participating actively with feedback and innovation towards building a collaborative dropout prevention strategy across sectors for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

This report outlines the recommendations provided at the summit as well as innovative responses provided in the PaDPN webinar series, "Perspectives on the Dropout Crisis." Concepts also include feedback from at-risk Pennsylvania youth, provided in the AT&T sponsored, "Youth Perspectives" focus group series.

A critical goal of the PaDPN is to provide actionable steps and solutions that work collaboratively and within the frameworks of multiple sectors towards reducing the dropout crisis in Pennsylvania. The progress of these recommendations and a series of deliverables and outcomes will subsequently be set and reviewed by the PaDPN Advisory Board towards measuring progress at reaching our collective goals.

structure

Participants of PaDPN events and trainings recommended strategic goals and structural concepts at the PaDPN Summit to promote a larger geographic and professional scope of participation in dropout prevention activities. These recommendations include:

- 1. Activation of County-Based Dropout Prevention Teams:** defined as participants from highly affected sectors such as: DPW, Children and Youth, MH/IDD, Juvenile Justice, Corrections, Drug and Alcohol agencies, Departments of Health, County Commissioners, School District Administrators, local services providers / human services, parents, youth, community colleges, universities, appropriate partners based on local collaborations.
- 2. Quarterly Regional Meetings and Annual State-Wide Meetings:** participants suggested that regionally based meetings would provide greater opportunity for local partners to meet and collaborate in trainings and innovation in dropout prevention. Further, participants emphasized the importance of state-wide events at least annually that showcase solutions and locally driven actions in dropout prevention.
- 3. Hub and Spoke Approach to Resources and Solutions:** participants recommended further use and building of the PaDPN website as a centralized repository of information for multiple sectors to include- schools, parents, youth, counties, businesses, community-based partners.
- 4. Formation of Sub-Committees:** stakeholders and participants agreed that workgroups or subcommittees should be formed to work in specific concentration areas in building resources to share via PaDPN and the succeedinpa.org website. Further trainings and actions should take place as a result of the work of these sub-committees with an emphasis on distance-learning and technology based meetings to accommodate representatives from all locations in Pennsylvania.
- 5. Further Training Opportunities and Awareness:** participant feedback emphasized the importance of opportunities and advance training which also provide for specific professional credits such as CEUs and Act 48 credits. Also, participants acknowledged the importance of administrative support across sectors for employee / professional staff participation in PaDPN events.

core strategies for the padpn in 2013-2014

Stakeholders and participants in PaDPN events provided feedback in group sessions during the 2013 summit in a final breakout session. This information was coded by level of importance by participants who represent various sectors and regions of Pennsylvania. The following six Core Areas are a direct result of this feedback and have been coded to accurately reflect participant scoring by level of importance and category area.

communications

1. Continued Stakeholder Outreach- Trainings and webinars have connected PaDPN with schools, community groups, policy makers, parents and students from across the Commonwealth. PaDPN will offer a minimum of six webinars in the coming school year to continue this outreach.

2. Statewide Media & Public Awareness- over the past 12 months, PaDPN and partners have generated an unprecedented amount of awareness around dropout prevention and the impact of dropouts on all Pennsylvanians. PaDPN and partners will commit to expanded awareness of the issue through regular communication with media, stakeholders, policy makers and parents. PaDPN will launch a series of newsletters, continue the series of whitepapers and introduce a podcast series.

3. Online Tools and Social Media- more individuals get information from the web and social media. PaDPN will increase the emphasis on timely updates via twitter and our website along with utilizing social media to connect with more partners and information sources.

relationships

1. Parent engagement- with recognition that many of the significant risk factors for school dropout (NDP/N, 2007) derive from early childhood or family experiences a core focus of the PaDPN should be to better engage parents at school and community levels for positive youth development in both social and academic pursuits. This critical element of a child's academic and social/emotional success leads to high standards and greater levels of support necessary for success towards and upon graduation from high school.

2. School Wide Positive Behavioral and Instructional Support- many of PA's schools currently align to SWPBIS, though funding for universal supports and increased individualized supports are limited in school budgets. An emphasis on supporting SWPBIS and the infusion of services and supports provides a school environment that nurtures student growth and support school staff in educating students as a primary function.

3. Greater community support within schools- community agencies and services are oftentimes available for youth and families, but with limited staff time to make referrals, limited time during the school-day to include programs, and decreased funding to support community-based providers communities across the Commonwealth face limited ability to connect students,

schools, and families to greatly needed services. Support for currently existing and evidence-based models of support that connect individuals with the help they need should be a priority of the PaDPN to decrease the burden of providing all of these services on school district staff. A support structure should include the school district administrations of all schools in Pennsylvania that better connects students with the help they need beyond the classroom.

4. Mentoring and Creating Connections- a well-known ideology is that “Programs don’t change lives, people do.” With an understanding of the importance in coaching students to success and connecting them with professional and personal mentors, an emphasis on growth relationships and coaching towards careers and college are an important component of supporting today’s students towards graduation.

resources

1. Funding Opportunities: a centralized resources which identifies funding and applicability to dropout prevention, with preference to participation as part of a larger dropout prevention framework, is necessary for bringing actionable steps and local plans to fruition. This centralized funding information may be suitable on the www.succeedinpa.org website or as part of an ongoing newsletter / email service to partners.

2. Centralized Repository of Information: research, “what works” in PA schools, and information on dropout prevention activities in other locales should be incorporated into information provided to the field at www.succeedinpa.org. Further, by separating resources links for parents, students, schools, and community partners information will be easily accessed in the filed ongoing and will become actionable. A suggested component includes a place to share and troubleshoot information among colleagues such as a chat or blog atmosphere which is highly monitored.

3. Showcase Evidence-Based Approaches: dropout prevention programs and projects are available online, but oftentimes lack research and evidence that the programs actually work. An important component for dropout prevention is to create a resource guide of programs that are proven effective within Pennsylvania communities and showcase these programs at regional or state-wide events.

policy

1. Eliminate “Dropout” as an Option: change the compulsory education ages for the Commonwealth with some exceptions such as abilities or religious purposes.

2. Internal Policies: create graduation focused policies for government agency services as well as graduation focused or education focused family support plans for employees at larger businesses and local businesses.

3. School Services for Mental Health: mental health and school counseling services are decreasing as student needs for these services are on the rise. PaDPN support for services that

build a connection with youth in the school environment is critical to assuring that a first-line of support is available to PA students.

4. Provide a Conduit for Advocacy: PaDPN support and organization of advocacy strategies and support for larger advocacy events will provide a formal stream of communication where individuals and local groups can strategically work towards dropout prevention measures and have a greater impact on local and state-wide stages.

culture

1. Rural Pennsylvania: rural school districts and communities face significant challenges linked to financial resources, but even more so to the availability of resources and solutions due to geographic isolation or “small numbers” of individuals to be served. Emphasis on Pennsylvania’s majority of rural districts through a specific work group and resources for support will advance dropout prevention and supportive measures in rural PA communities.

2. Family and School Culture: a strategy for engaging parents, grandparents, and all families in the school environment requires opportunities and a culture shift that opens school doors in new and different ways. Supportive efforts for families within schools will provide for enhanced school and family partnerships leading to greater social and academic success for students and increased resources and volunteerism in support of schools.

3. Language and New Resident / Immigrant Focus: language and cultural barriers for new resident families require an understanding of the culture brought with the individual student to the new school. Language barriers and cultural changes can make adapting to a new learning environment difficult for the student and his/her family. An important element of engaging all PA students is working across these barriers to bridge education with the student’s culture and language of origin.

4. Focus on At-Risk Populations: data shows that specific demographic groups to include Hispanic and African American youth are more highly at-risk for school dropout. Special initiatives that include these groups and potential issues share among members of these populations should be of focus in efforts to have the greatest impact in school dropout actions of the PaDPN.

mental health and wellness

1. Parenting Support: provision of family services or family center services to fulfill basic human needs and elevate support from families in poverty are critical to supporting PA’s youth towards graduation.

2. Trauma Focused Approaches: a significant number of PA’s students report depression, facing violence on a daily basis, and in specific areas reflect environments of high trauma all which affect a student’s preparedness to learn in the classroom. Approaches that reduce the impact of trauma and work to help students feel safe at school and in going home will build greater supports to success for PA’s youth.

3. Social and Emotional Learning: PA students benefit from school-wide services and systems of support with focus on evidence-based and professionally driven social and emotional supports. These supports when focused on individual student success and outcomes can act as a conduit towards graduation and reduce behavioral referrals and suspensions leading to truancy and dropout.

4. Pennsylvania Youth Survey: PAYS provides a tool that measures aggregate level social, emotional, and behavioral patterns in populations to gauge risks for delinquency and school dropout. Support of the PAYS and data-driven decision making through the PaDPN provides support and empowerment for youth voice and implementation of programs and resources that reduce risk factors for school dropout.

action steps: community and state-wide level phase I

County Based Teams	Quarterly Meetings	Subcommittees / Special Topics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find Champion for County-Level Teams in each PA County (agency or person) • PaDPN to Provide Strategic Template: Core Areas List for local action and decision making / planning • TA from PaDPN or training to county level point staff in Harrisburg: the process of dropout prevention and data collection (Assessing the Problem) • Creation of County Action Plans, Efforts to Implement Policy / Programs / Strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with current regional designations or designate regions for quarterly meetings. • Orientation to PaDPN and Dropout Prevention Presentations (Summer /Fall 2013) • Creating a County Plan Presentations (PaDPN Staff: Winter / Spring 2014) • Implementing Strategies and Solutions in Core Areas and Across Sectors Presentation (Spring / Summer 2014) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building Relationships and Supports • Building Resources and Tools • Creating a Policy Driven Approach to Dropout Prevention • Developing Support for School-Based Counselors and School Mental Health Services • Creating a Caring Culturally-Based Approach to Dropout Prevention: addressing our most at-risk populations

action plan: padpn support staff level phase I

Professional Credits / Training	Establishing Centralized Resources	Strategic School Support Plan and Technical Assistance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and Submit Act 48 Application for School Counselors • Develop and Submit NBCC CEU Application for Mental Health Professionals • Establish series of trainings for administrators and leadership of county teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request for Resources at state and national levels for posting on www.succeedinpa.org • Placement of resources and establishing web-based communication site for participant communication • Development of newsletter and funding list resources that share applicability in dropout prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of strategic support plan to PA's top 20% high-risk districts • Invitation for district participation • Training and technical assistance to supported districts ongoing