



Building Bridges Workgroup

Summary

Washington State graduation rates have been trending upward over the past ten years, reaching 76.5 percent for on-time graduation and 82.6 percent for extended for the 2009–10 graduating class.

However, this improved rate still equates to 14,781 students who dropped out of high school in the 2009–10 school year. Each day 82 students, or three full classrooms, disappear from our schools across the state. Additionally, when we look beyond the

overall rate, the figures are even more disturbing for our most vulnerable youth. Given the societal costs associated with high school dropout and the savings from preventing dropout, there is a clear need for a coordinated and targeted prevention, intervention, and reengagement system that keeps students engaged in school and on track to graduate from high school.

Enabling legislation

HB 1573 (2007)

<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/summary.aspx?bill=1573&year=2007>

Randy Dorn
Superintendent
of Public
Instruction

OSPI
Old Capitol
Building
PO Box 47200
Olympia, WA
98504-7200

Background

The Washington Legislature addressed the dropout issue in 2005 when it directed the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to investigate the underlying reasons for students dropping out and to identify practices and programs that were successful at addressing those reasons. In the 2007–09 biennium, the Legislature continued their commitment to addressing the dropout issue by passing Substitute House Bill (SHB) 1573, which established the Building Bridges Workgroup. The workgroup was charged with providing recommendations annually to the Legislature and the Office of the Governor for implementing emerging best practices in dropout prevention, intervention and retrieval programs.

In 2011, the Legislature funded the Building Bridges initiative, as well as passed HB 1599 (<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/summary.aspx?bill=1599&year=2011>). This legislation expanded the Dropout Prevention and Intervention Retrieval (DPIR) model, funded a number of proven dropout prevention programs (Building Bridges, Jobs for America’s Graduates, Opportunity Internship Program and the College Success Foundation Student Support Services), and established Graduation: A Team Effort (GATE). GATE is a collaborative effort involving state, regional and local entities that is focused on supporting every child through graduation by effective use of data, sound policy, effective partnerships, and best practice programming.

As a result of this legislation, the Building Bridges Workgroup was transformed into the GATE Advisory Committee. The advisory committee’s job is to oversee direct service programming, including Building Bridges and subsequent legislative policy actions. Similar to the Building Bridges Workgroup, the new GATE Advisory Committee is comprised of multiple state partners representing K–12 education,



social and health services, the courts, workforce agencies, and community organizations.

The work of the GATE Advisory Group is founded on the following key principles:

- Decision-making should be informed by quality school and community data.
- Integration with district and school-wide reforms (e.g., student support systems, district and school improvement planning).
- Integrated school, family, community and agency partnerships.

Below is a summary of the work that has taken place since December 2010.

1. Serving in an advisory capacity, the GATE Advisory Committee assumed the role of the Building Bridges Workgroup. Workgroups were formed in August 2011 to work in specific areas, which include: data, policy and funding, technical assistance, and collaboration. Each of the four workgroups are working on various systemic development projects.
2. Direct service to students has continued with the release of Building Bridges grants in November 2011 to Granite Falls School District, Educational Service District 113, and Vancouver School District. Each of these grantees is working in partnership with schools, families, and communities to build a comprehensive dropout prevention, intervention, and retrieval system that identifies middle and high school students who are “at risk” of dropping out of school and provide timely interventions and supports. Each grantee also must develop and implement programs to reengage students who have already dropped out of school.
3. The first phase of a three-part project for developing regional district and school data teams began in October 2011. This project includes the creation of a Data Toolkit containing protocols, templates, and informational resources, as well as the training and certification of regional data coaches. Once certified, a regional data coach will support both the establishment of data teams and the use of inquiry to drive school and district improvement.
4. The effort to implement a Dropout Early Warning Intervention System (DEWIS) continues. DEWIS is a system to identify students who are at risk of dropping out and provide an intervention process to respond to those risks. It involves creating a student “watch list” by establishing criteria, running that criteria against data already in the student information system, and recommending appropriate interventions. Student progress is tracked and monitored regularly, individual interventions are evaluated for effectiveness, and trends are analyzed for system implications to ensure the needs of all students are being addressed.

The GATE Advisory Committee believes that the collective impact of all programs working toward the common goal of dropout prevention and reengagement will show significant, quantifiable and positive results over the next few years, thus reducing the number of students who become disenfranchised and drop out of the education system. The committee created “Essential Elements of a Dropout Prevention, Intervention and Reengagement System” in September 2011. The elements include: data-driven decision making, community collaboration and partnerships, student and family engagement, involvement of a caring adult, expansion of relevant learning, transformational leadership, and integrated funding. A complete description of the Essential Elements can be found at <http://www.k12.wa.us/SecondaryEducation/GraduationTeamEffort/default.aspx>.

For more information about OSPI’s drop-out prevention efforts, please contact Dixie Grunenfelder at Dixie.grunenfelder@k12.wa.us or 360.725.6045.