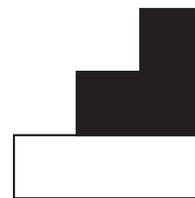
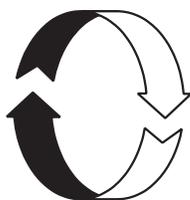


How to Develop an Effective Dropout Prevention Program



In this section is an outline of an eight-step action planning process for creating an effective dropout prevention program. It details the specific steps and tools of the planning model designed for a school-based dropout prevention project (Destination Graduation, sponsored by the New York State Education Department and implemented at Peekskill Middle School, New York, through the Hudson Valley Center for Coordinated School Health). It uses the framework of the principles of effectiveness as well as ecological intervention tools for creating and strengthening school–community partnerships. This model can be applied to the prevention of any risky youth behavior, such as substance use, early and unwanted pregnancy, human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, violence, or—as it appears here—dropping out of school.

Eight steps to action planning: A process for developing effective prevention programs

An effective prevention programs must have as its foundation a thorough and complete analysis of the specific risk and protective factors that contribute to the formation of both the risk (i.e., “problem”) behaviors as well as the healthy (i.e., “desired”) behaviors.

Corresponding strategies to address the problem behaviors must be either research-based models or promising practices. These promising practices, although perhaps not yet rigorously evaluated, should be based on sound scientific theory. These strategies may be synonymous with identified protective factors, or they may be practical applications of these protective factors. For example, an identified risk factor when dealing with dropout prevention aimed at middle-school youth might be “lack of healthy role models of older youth.” A protective factor would naturally be “healthy role models of older youth.” A specific research-based strategy might be “a mentoring program that pairs high-school mentors with middle-school mentees.” See the National Mentoring Partnership for additional resources on mentoring online at www.mentoring.org/index.adp.

Additionally, a strong working partnership between the school and the community must be established. This partnership increases available resources and acts as a significant protective factor by strengthening the safety net that keeps children from “falling through the cracks.” The members responsible for implementing the action

plan must be a cohesive, committed team of persons who represent the various sectors of that particular community. A key component for any effective planning process is the formation of this team.

Step 1: Creating a school–community team—community eco-map

Refer to the sections on “Who Should Be on the Action Team?” and “Eight Steps for Establishing an Action Team” and the eco-map on pages 130, 130, and 133. Consult the following reference for further discussion on the use of this innovative tool for diagramming the human ecosystem within a community: Hartman A: Diagrammatic assessment of family relationships. *Social Casework* 59: 456–478, 1978.

Step 2: The vision process—creating a vision for the project

After each team member has had a chance to record his or her “vision,” create a collective vision statement by incorporating all responses. This can take the form of a bulleted list or a narrative statement.

Step 3: Generating risk and protective factors

Present the Four Principles of Effectiveness. Consult the following reference for more information: United States Department of Education: *Non-regulatory Guidance for Implementing the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Community Act (SDFSCA) Principles of Effectiveness*. Washington, DC, United States Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, SDFSCA Program, May 1998.

Introduce the Needs Assessment process (Principle 1) as the analysis of risk and protective factors. This process is most effective when organized around data analysis using these five domains: individual and peer group, family, school, community, and sociopolitical environment (optional).

Using the worksheet on page 134, ask the group to generate the specific risk factors associated with students dropping out of high school for each of the domains. The last domain is optional because it can become more theoretical than practical. For each risk factor, identify indicators and corresponding data sources. See page 135 for an example of this process.

Using the worksheet on page 136, continue the process, matching risk factors with corresponding protective factors, effective research-based strategies, and promising programs. Indicate existing resources within the school and community, and identify any gaps in resources and services (see page 137 for an example of this process). Consult the following reference for promising practices and research-based strategies: Franklin S, Smink J: *Strategies to Help Solve Our School Dropout Problem*. West Larchmont, NY, Eye on Education, 2001.

Step 4: Narrowing the scope of the project—selecting risk factors

Ask the group to choose major risk factors from each of the domains. List one of them in each of the spaces in the first column of the worksheet on page 138. See page 139 for an example.

Step 5: Correlate research-based strategies and protective factors with selected risk factors

Using the same worksheet, match each of the selected risk factors with corresponding research-based strategies and protective factors from the previous handouts. See page 139 for an example.

Step 6: Generating goals and objectives for selected risk and protective factors

A goal is a broad statement of what is to be accomplished. The goals of the action plan should directly address what the earlier needs assessment process identified as being gaps in resources or services. Objectives detail the specific ways in which each goal will be achieved. Using the worksheet on page , list each goal and generate a list of corresponding objectives for each one, incorporating protective factors and research-based strategies into the objective. An example of this process is shown on page 141.

Step 7: Evaluation measures—performance indicators

An important part of this action-planning process is the periodic review and refinement of goals and objectives. Write up one or more performance indicators for each objective that detail how the accomplishment of this objective can be measured.

Step 8: Tasks and timelines

Break each objective into associated tasks and timelines for completion and associate it with the team member responsible for its accomplishment. This serves as a “map” to guide the team as they meet periodically. Each task can be checked for completion or revision along the way.

Who Should Be on the Action Team?

The action team, to be established by the school district, should be composed of 10 to 15 members who represent the following groups (members can be in more than one group):

- ◆ Middle school, high school, elementary school staff including principals, assistant principals, teachers, special educators, teachers union, guidance counselors, social workers, psychologists, and teacher aides
- ◆ Parents and guardians
- ◆ Youth and students
- ◆ District curriculum coordinators and administrators
- ◆ Board of Education members
- ◆ Community-based organizations
- ◆ Faith-based organizations
- ◆ Community and county agencies
- ◆ Business community
- ◆ Medical, health, and mental health agencies
- ◆ Social service agencies
- ◆ Higher education, universities, and community colleges

Eight Steps for Establishing an Action Team

Step 1: Identify who is currently a member of the local action team (LAT).

Identify what constituency (may be more than one) each member represents using the previous list of suggestions for persons who should compose the LAT.

Using the community eco-map (page 133), designate separate circles for each system, including elementary, middle, and high school. Write the name of the system in the circle. Write the role (i.e., social worker) of each member within his or her respective circle.

Draw a line between the LAT in the center of the eco-map and each of the circles to designate the nature of their connection. Use a solid line (____) to denote a strong or solid connection to the LAT, a broken line (- - - -) to denote a tenuous connection (e.g., a high school or elementary school principal not fully prepared for the job), and a railroad line (/\/\/\/\/) to denote a problematic or adversarial connection (e.g., a school staff member negative toward any additional “work” or projects or who may actively try to block the efforts of the team).

Step 2: Brainstorm a list of *who* in the community is affected by the dropout problem.

Write down each system (e.g., family, business, law enforcement) that is not currently a member of the LAT within a separate circle on the eco-map.

Step 3: Discuss *how* each of these systems is affected by the dropout problem.

The results of this discussion can be listed next to each circle on the eco-map.

- Step 4:** Link the *how* (i.e., way in which the systems are affected by the dropout problem) *with possible benefits* to each system of helping to solve the dropout problem within the community. See page 141 for an example of the linking process.

Answer the critical question for each system. To put it another way, tune into station WIFM: What's In It For Me? In many instances, the benefits may simply be a matter of reversing costs.

- Step 5:** Using the community eco-map, draw a broken line (- - - -) from the LAT in the center, connecting any of these groups that should be represented but are not currently a part of the LAT.

- Step 6:** Identify a specific member within each group who can be contacted by a member of the LAT, and write their name in the circle.

- Step 7:** Designate who from the LAT might be the best person to contact each specific member of the groups listed on the community eco-map, and write their name above the dotted line.

Discuss whom would be the person most likely to positively influence this system by factoring in previous relationship or connection, similarity of position or background, or ability to communicate favorably. Keep in mind the notion of WIFM, and look at it from the point of view of how involvement in the project can benefit the system.

- Step 8:** Go back to the step one. Identify the weak or adversarial connections within the LAT.

Apply the process outlined in steps three through seven to strengthen these connections within the team.

The Four Principles of Effectiveness

From “Non-regulatory Guidance for Implementing the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Community Act (SDFSCA) Principles of Effectiveness, United States Department of Education,” Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, SDFSCA Program, May 1998.

◆ **Principle 1: *Needs assessment***

A school district shall base its program on a thorough assessment of objective data about drug and violence problems in the schools and communities it serves.

◆ **Principle 2: *Measurable goals and objectives***

A school district shall, with the assistance of a local or regional advisory council, establish a set of measurable goals and objectives and design its programs to meet these goals and objectives.

◆ **Principle 3: *Research approaches to prevention***

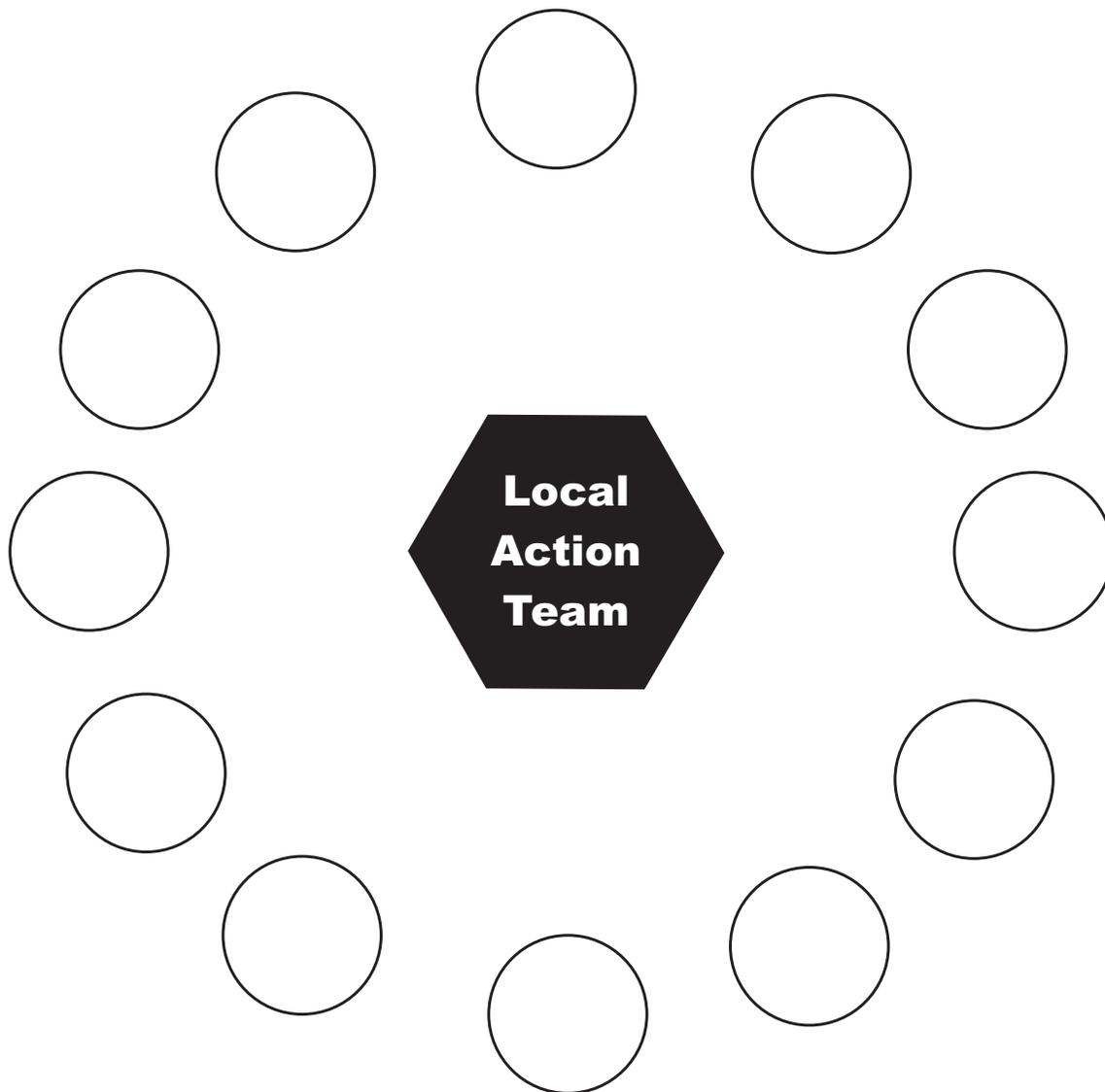
School districts shall design and implement its programs for youth based on research and evaluation providing evidence that the programs used actually prevent or decrease drug use, violence, or disruptive behavior among youth.

◆ **Principle 4: *Evaluation***

A school district shall evaluate its programs periodically to assess progress made toward achieving goals and objectives as well as use evaluation research to refine, improve, and strengthen its program and to refine goals and objectives as appropriate.

Community eco-map

-  = strong, solid connection
-  = tenuous or weak connection
-  = problematic or adversarial connection



Handout for generating risk factors

(Circle One) Individual Family School Community

<i>Risk Factors</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Data Sources</i>

Example of risk factors generated by Destination Graduation at Peekskill Middle School

(Circle one) Individual Family School Community

<i>Risk Factors</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Data Sources</i>
Fighting and violence Substance abuse Promiscuity	Drug use, violence, provocative dress Talk and attitude favorable to drugs, sex, and violence	Violates school code of conduct, gets suspended and expelled Health care: sexually transmitted diseases, human immunodeficiency virus, injuries, drug overdose Juvenile justice and law enforcement: court and law enforcement involvement
Low expectations Disconnected and disaffected Low bonding to school Unrealistic goals Poor academic achievement	Poor test scores Drops out Does not complete assignments Poor grades	Test scores Report cards Attendance
Excessive family responsibilities Poverty and low socioeconomic status Lack of food, clean clothes, and school supplies	Misses school and homework assignments Tardy and/or leaves early No school supplies Does not attend school due to lack of clean clothes Has to care for younger siblings	Test scores Attendance Free and reduced-cost meals Department of Social Services

Handout to correlate risk factors with corresponding protective factors, research-based strategies, and programs

(Circle one) Individual Family School Community

<i>Protective Factors</i>	<i>Resources</i>

Example of correlating risk factors with corresponding protective factors, research-based strategies, and programs by Destination

(Circle one) Individual Family School Community

Graduation at Peekskill Middle School

<i>Protective Factors</i>	<i>Community Resources</i>
<p>(Correlated with risk factors)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counseling and mental health strategies • Prevention curricula and skill building • Coordinated school health approaches • Mediation and conflict resolution • Law enforcement involvement and school resource officers • Clear and consistent communication of rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School counselors and community mental health counselors • Health teachers: prevention curricula • Hudson River Health Care Center: RAP Program (human immunodeficiency virus [HIV] and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome [AIDS] peer education), Girl Talk, Teen Clinic • Planned parenthood: health services, education about sexually transmitted diseases and HIV • Youth Bureau programs • School resource officers • Positive behavioral intervention and support process (PBIS)
<p>(Correlated with risk factors)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting students' interest in photography, music, and art with academic areas and enrichment opportunities • Opportunities for youth involvement • Tutoring, homework help • Healthy adult and older youth role models • College preparation • Mentors, coaches, and advisors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YES after-school program • Gear-Up (college preparation program at Westchester Community College) • Youth Bureau programs
<p>(Correlated with risk factors)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free and reduced-cost meals • Provide food, clothing, and school supplies • Provide referrals to community resources (to parents and guardians) for medical, housing, child care, food, employment, legal, and other services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YES after-school program • Department of Social Services • Hudson River Health Care
<p>(Integrates previous three areas)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate existing community programs with the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After-school and tutoring programs in Peekskill • Peekskill Agencies Together Meetings

Worksheet for listing risk factors and protective factors

<i>Risk Factor or Problem</i>	<i>Protective Factors or Resources</i>

Example of risk factors and protective factors generated by Destination Graduation at Peekskill Middle School

Risk Factor or Problem

Individual:

Students are disengaged from the school, resulting in poor attendance and grades

Family:

Families lack access to resources such as food, clean clothing, adequate housing, child care, and employment, resulting in students having poor attendance and grades, possible behavior problems

School:

Lack of differential instruction to accommodate all levels of students, resulting in wide achievement gap between students

Protective Factors or Resources

Individual:

Re-engage students through smaller group size (school within a school), mentoring programs, individualized attention and instruction, after-school programs, Gear Up, and family coordinators

Family:

Provide links to community resources for parents, and elicit parents' energy and involvement in child's education, family ties, EPIC Parent Program, community agencies, family coordinators

School:

Staff development in differential instruction

Worksheet for generating goals and objectives

Goal number:

Objectives:

Goal number:

Objectives:

Goals and objectives generated by Destination Graduation at Peekskill Middle School

Goal no. 1: Improve academic achievement for cohort of middle school students

- Objectives:**
1. Develop criteria, and select 25 students to participate in pilot program to foster student achievement
 2. Develop and enhance leadership skills of a cohort of middle school students to build self-esteem
 3. Implement a variety of methods to celebrate student achievement to build self-esteem and ability to set and achieve goals
 4. Implement student orientation for cohort in collaboration with community-based organizations to engage students in program
 5. Implement mentoring program that partners high school and middle school students to ease the transition of middle schools students to high school
 6. Implement mentoring program that partners middle school and elementary school (incoming seventh-grade students) to develop leadership skills of middle school students and ease transition of sixth-grade students into middle school
 7. Implement adult and student mentoring program pairing cohort students with an adult mentor
 8. Facilitate participation in after-school program (YES) of cohort students to provide help with schoolwork and enrichment activities
 9. Supervise cohort participation in YES program and create strong links between school and YES program to furnish additional individualized help with school work and enrichment activities
 10. Begin planning process with Peekskill City School District to develop and implement training for school staff to integrate technology into classroom instruction.

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Hawkins D, Catalano RF, Miller JY: 1992. Risk and protective factors for alcohol and other drug problems in adolescence and early adulthood: Implications for substance abuse prevention. *Psychology Bulletin* **112**(1): 64–105,

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