



REDUCE THE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE: COLLEGE AND CAREER PREPARATION



OVERVIEW

By 2018, 75% of all jobs in the District of Columbia will require some form of postsecondary education. Right now, only 67% of DCPS graduates enroll in college; and only 24% earn an Associate's or Bachelor's degree within 6 years. Thus, while the District's economy is thriving, many DCPS graduates have been passed over for high-wage, high-demand jobs in favor of non-DC residents with undergraduate and advanced degrees. In order to change the destiny of our graduates, we must ensure that they are prepared to succeed in college and careers in DC and across the nation.



CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

College and career preparation for students will require us to address the following challenges:

- **Lack of Early College & Career Exposure for Middle Grade Students**

Waiting until high school to expose students to college and career opportunities is too late for them to be successful. While we have piloted a career exposure program for our middle school students, our goal is to harness our middle schoolers' excitement around "what they want to be when they grow up" to help them develop a better understanding of the concrete steps needed to make smart high school, college, and career choices.

Strategies to consider: College and career clubs in middle school; industry site visits and college tours.

- **Lack of Strong College & Career Supports and Resources in Our High Schools**

To build upon the momentum established in the middle grades, our high school students often struggle in taking the necessary steps during the college and career search and application process. Schools do not have the resources to provide targeted support, and as a result, navigating the process can feel overwhelming to students and their families.

Strategies to consider: College and Career Coordinators in high schools; college tours for students and parents; college and career fairs; paid internship opportunities; SAT test preparation.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Improved student satisfaction
- Increased student enrollment
- Improved outcomes in lowest performing schools
- Increased graduation rates

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- What, in your opinion, are the greatest barriers standing between our DCPS students and success in college and/or careers?

REDUCE THE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE: ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS



OVERVIEW

Last year, DCPS prioritized investments in our high schools. We added staff, increased funding, and expanded course offerings, all to ensure that our students graduate from high school prepared for college and career success. Still, nearly 1,500 of our students fall behind in school, and many drop out before they earn a diploma. They are older than their classmates yet have earned far fewer credits and often have encountered obstacles on the path to graduation. These students share the same needs of all high school students but often have severe literacy and math deficits and unique social-emotional challenges, making alternative pathways to graduation critically important to their success.

Our goal for these students remains the same – earning a high school diploma and succeeding in college and career – but the pathway to help them achieve that goal looks different than that of most high school students. Though programs like Luke C. Moore Alternative High School, Washington Metropolitan High School, and STAY have made great strides in serving these students, we want to provide them and all of our high schools with adequate resources to help these students achieve at high levels.



CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

Building alternative pathways for our high school students that need it most will require us to address the following challenges:

- **Low Literacy and Math Skill Levels**

High school students far from graduation often struggle with basic literacy and math skills. They have frequently fallen far behind their peers and need targeted interventions to allow them to access high school coursework and ultimately earn a high school diploma.

Strategies to consider: Reading and math intervention specialists; extended day; extended year.

- **High School Credit Deficits**

Compared to their peers, alternative pathways students are typically at least two years behind in credit accumulation, and older as a result. They drop out at much higher rates when they cannot graduate with or as close as possible to the cohort they entered 9th grade with. If a student falls behind, the typical high school credit accumulation schedule does not allow them the opportunity to catch up to their peers, and they may leave school without a clear and specialized pathway to graduation.

Strategies to consider: Accelerated credit accumulation opportunities; flexible scheduling; blended learning programming.

- **Challenging Life Circumstances**

Often, alternative pathways students have fallen behind due to life circumstances. Some have social-emotional needs that traditional supports in a high school cannot address. Others have life obligations that prevent them from attending high school during the traditional program hours. Without these needs addressed, they struggle to persist towards high school graduation.

Strategies to consider: Additional Mental Health and Social Work Professionals; childcare; life skills coursework, including financial literacy support.

- **Unique Postsecondary Support Needs**

High school graduation is our goal for our alternative pathways students, but ultimately, we want them to succeed beyond graduation. Alternative pathways students need tailored supports to ensure they connect to college and career opportunities and persist when they encounter challenges. As with most of our students, if they do not see a clear path to life success, they disengage and leave school.

Strategies to consider: Targeted counseling to connect students to college and career opportunities; dual enrollment programming; expanded career education course offerings.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Increased student achievement
- Improved school culture
- Improved teacher support
- Increased teacher retention

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- How can we address these challenges?
- Are there unique structures, staff, and resources that these students might require?