



Indicator: The school provides all students with opportunities for content and credit recovery that are integrated into the regular school day to keep them on track for graduation. (5130)

Explanation: The evidence review suggests that dropout rates are significantly increased for students who miss and/or fail classes. Because the school has the responsibility to prepare its students for college and/or career, it must afford every student every opportunity to earn a high school degree. Providing standards aligned, credit recovery class options for students who miss and/or fail coursework required for a degree decreases student dropout rates and increases on time graduation rates.

Questions: What process will the school employ to offer credit recovery options to students at risk of dropping out and not attaining a high school degree? How will the school ensure that there is equitable access to credit recovery classes such as in school and out of school choices? How will the school ensure that the credit recovery options are aligned to the rigors of the required standards for the intended content? How will the school measure the success of credit recovery options? How will the school utilize new and engaging technologies to attract and retain at risk students? How will the school ensure that the most qualified and engaging instructors teach the credit recovery classes?

One of the strongest predictors of a student being likely to drop out of high school is the failure to accumulate credits for the courses he or she has taken. When students do not pass the courses necessary for graduation, schools must make decisions as to their standing and status. Yet schools have few meaningful options to address this issue. It may seem intuitive for a student to repeat whatever courses and grades he or she was unable to pass. However, research from as early as 1986 showed that students who had repeated one grade were 45 percent more likely to not finish high school, and that figure doubles if a student has repeated two grade levels (Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999). Research from New York City showed that of students who were over-age for their grade and had not accumulated the expected number of credits, only 19 percent graduated or got an equivalency diploma ("Afterschool," 2009).

A growing part of the dropout prevention field is the area of credit recovery. Trotter (2008) specifically defines credit recovery as "an in-school opportunity for students to earn academic credits that they have lost, or are about to lose, by failing a regular course" (p. 2). Due to increased demands, as well as threats of fewer funds and increased monitoring, to reduce dropout rates, schools are increasingly turning to online credit recovery options, as a cost-effective way to address a growing problem. (Picciano, et al., 2011; Trotter, 2008). Many schools have credit-retrieval "labs," where students are scheduled to go during the school day—or in some cases, after-school, at night, during the summer, or on weekends—to work on online versions of the courses that they did not pass in person (Trotter, 2008; "Afterschool," 2009; Watson & Gemin, 2008). The Talent Development schools have a Ninth Grade Repeater Academy for students who did not earn enough credits to be promoted; the goal is that students start what would be their tenth grade year in this academy, with the goal of recuperating those credits by the middle of the year (Niels, 2009).

In a survey of principals from school year 2008-2009, 73 percent of respondents indicated that credit recovery was an important reason for having blended or online learning at their school. Picciano, et al. (2011) found that credit

recovery was the most popular type of online course provided at the surveyed schools, most likely because these courses are pre-packaged and self-guided, allowing students to independently make up lost content and coursework. Blended learning is particularly appealing to schools because not only are students able to work at their own pace and experience success, but a model of independent, online credit recovery also requires fewer staff and space resources than a traditional class (Horn & Staker, 2011).

However, the role of an in-person teacher has been cited as a strength of blended learning credit recovery programs (Dessoff, 2009). Watson and Gemin (2008) discuss how having a teacher present in recovery programs has allowed for better identification of student needs and differentiated instruction of students based on those needs. These types of blended programs provide the opportunity for students to feel success through individualized online content and in-person support, and they often recover their credits more quickly as a result.

Online or blended learning is not the only viable option for credit recovery. Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) note that although the General Educational Development (GED) program and examination is designed for students who have already dropped out of high school, the GED Testing Service has authorized a concurrent high school-GED course pathway to prevent dropout. These programs, which exist in 12 states, allow the GED tests to be used as a form of credit recovery for students who are still enrolled in high school during the regular school schedule. As the GED curriculum is designed to hone rudimentary and foundational skills, this method may prove beneficial to students who have struggled in school for many years.

Despite the growing interest in credit recovery programs, there are still significant concerns with the various models that exist. Students who are enrolled in these types of programs are typically performing below grade level standards and may therefore struggle to do the independent reading and math work required of a self-guided course for students their age. Students may also lack the motivation or self-discipline to push through a different type of course if they have previously had difficulty in school (Picciano, et al., 2011). There is also skepticism that schools are using online credit recovery courses as an easy solution to the complex problem of dropout prevention. Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) discuss the difficulty evaluating dropout prevention programs; many

strategies and programs have not been peer-reviewed, and others only address what happens after a student drops out.

Schools and districts have many options for how to support students at risk of dropping out and for how to provide opportunities for them to make up credits they may have lost, in order to stay on track to graduate. While there are mixed results and limited empirical evidence on the subject, the literature provides numerous examples of blended programs that provide both academic and motivational support for at-risk students – both of which are critical in order for persist and succeed

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