

## SAMPLE STATE STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS TO REACH COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

As more students take challenging courses in high school, states and districts will need more creative and more effective ways to support students who struggle to meet those challenges. States with college- and career-ready graduation requirements are expecting more of their students and need to be willing and able to provide the supports and incentives necessary to ensure all students are able to excel under the new requirements. Such supports may include accelerated learning options, extended learning time programs and afterschool programs, data-driven dropout prevention and credit recovery programs, virtual learning opportunities that expand access, and efforts to create personalized learning environments.

Determining the appropriate state role in providing or enabling student supports is a critical and often difficult issue. While a few states have put successful programs together, most have delegated this responsibility to districts or schools. In states where the latter is true, leaders can look for opportunities to leverage or take to scale effective efforts that are already underway at the local level. And just as important, states may find there are already a number of partners engaged and willing to take an active role in supporting students.

Below are sample snapshots of state-developed supports, drawn from publicly available web materials:

- *Georgia's Graduation Specialists*
- *Indiana's Comprehensive Approach to Dropout Prevention and Credit Recovery*
- *Massachusetts' Extended Learning Time Initiative*
- *Virginia's Algebra Readiness Initiative & Project Graduation*

### ***Georgia's Graduation Specialists***

In 2006, Georgia, under the direction of Governor Sunny Perdue, enacted legislation for the creation of the ***High School Graduation Coach Initiative*** and ***Middle School Graduation Coach Initiative***. Through these initiatives, graduation coaches are tasked with identifying “at-risk” students within a school and employing strategies to get them back on track for graduation and success in school. The mission of Georgia graduation coaches is “*To ensure the successful transition of all students from elementary to middle school, middle to high school, and high school to post-secondary education or work.*”<sup>1</sup>

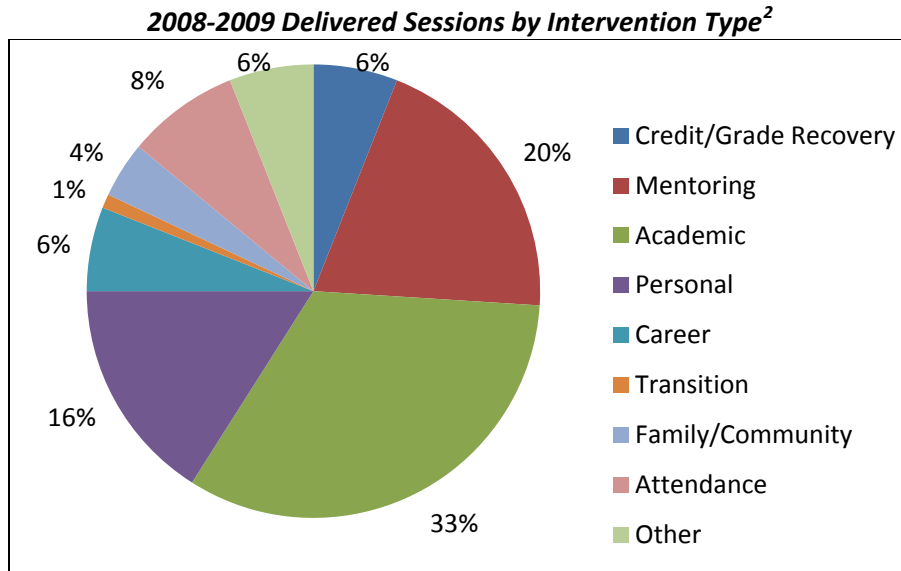
Coaches work with students and offer help by enlisting powerful tools to give students extra support and attention in the areas needed. Many coaches utilize support mechanisms such as credit recovery and tutoring targeted to preparing students to pass high school assessments, but coaches also have the flexibility to create their own methods. This allows for truly innovative strategies to emerge as different coaches envision different tactics for addressing the problem of students dropping out of school. Some schools use online software that provides students with access to supplemental lessons online, and the opportunity to take quizzes to test their understanding of the curriculum. In other districts, middle school coaches have teamed up with high school coaches to form a program where formerly at-risk high school juniors are paired up with at-risk middle school students to relate personal experiences and provide motivation.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/Grad%20Coach%20Brochure%202-25-09.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F6203302D18B9A0EDB84F86834EFF1A0917912268A409BA120&Type=D>

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This pie chart details the service sessions reported by graduation coaches in 2008-2009 according to intervention type. Academic, mentoring and personal interventions represent the most common intervention types delivered by graduation coaches.



Success for the graduation coach initiative is certainly evident. When the program began in 2006, the state’s graduation rate stood at 70.8%. In 2007, that number jumped to 72.3%; in 2008, 75.4%; and 2009, 78.9%, the highest in Georgia’s history.

Amidst budget cuts, graduation coaches are still employed in large numbers throughout the state, a testament to its favorability and success. However due to budget restraints in this economic climate, some schools have been forced to cut. There were 687 middle and high school graduation coaches for the 2009-2010 school year, representing a decrease of nearly 20% from 2008-2009. Due to a lack of funding, statewide training is no longer available for graduation coaches. However, the Georgia Department of Education provides individualized training for new coaches through five regional school improvement specialists and also provides technical assistance as needed for other graduation coaches.

Taking Georgia’s lead, other states including Alabama and North Carolina have also formulated graduation coach initiatives to assist students on their journey through high school. Georgia remains the only state to employ graduation coaches in nearly every high school in the state (previously every high school in the state before budgetary issues), but Alabama and North Carolina are experimenting with dropout prevention coaches. In Alabama, the Graduation Coach Pilot Program was implemented in September of 2008, and graduation coaches now target “at-risk” students for additional help and tutoring. The program placed 25 coaches in the most “in-need” schools, and, if legislation passes, the program could expand to 200 coaches. North Carolina passed legislation in 2008 providing funding for 100 graduation coaches to be placed in middle and high schools throughout the state. Committed graduation coaches and community leaders should help to ensure the success of both Alabama’s and North Carolina’s programs as well.

<sup>2</sup> Georgia Graduation Coach Initiative 2008-2009 Report, <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/2008-2009%20Graduation%20Initiative%20Report%20FINAL%206-10-10.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F664D63D881039F15595DE20AC808B98D5A87056ED593DF758&Type=D>

### *Indiana's Comprehensive Approach to Dropout Prevention and Credit Recovery*

In 2005 and 2006, Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels signed legislation that enacted a number of programs and strategies to increase graduation rates. These programs include dropout prevention and recovery strategies and dual enrollment programs. Most students in Indiana are now required to attend school until age 18 – students between the ages of 16- 18 are required to have approval from their parents and principal in order to drop out. If students drop out without permission, they can lose their work permits and driving privileges. Students truant from school for 10 days also lose their work permits.

All eighth-grade students in Indiana develop a *flexible career plan* that indicates the students' areas of interest, the courses needed for graduation, and the students' goals. Schools are required to review students' plans each year and provide supports and services to students who are not making adequate progress towards graduation.

*School Flex* is a dropout prevention program that serves at-risk 11th- and 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students. The state has developed eligibility criteria to ensure the program is targeted to the most at-risk students. Criteria include failing the state's graduation exam at least twice, being chronically absent, and being significantly behind in credits. Students in the program are enrolled in high school part time and may work or take postsecondary educational courses part time. While participating in the program, students continue to earn credits towards graduation and must maintain a 95% attendance rate and not be expelled or suspended.

*Fast Track* allows the state's public colleges and universities to offer high school completion programs for students ages 17 years or older. Participating students earn a high school diploma while enrolled in an associate's degree or certificate program. School districts pay tuition for the high school courses taken by participating students who are 17-18 years old. Students are able to transfer their high school credits to the program. In order to receive a high school diploma, students must pass the state graduation exam or an approved equivalent and complete the requirements for Indiana's General Diploma and the requirements of the college and university.

*Double-Up* allows public colleges and universities to develop partnerships with schools to offer early college, dual credit, and dual enrollment opportunities to 11th- and 12th-grade students. Partnerships jointly develop admissions requirements and course fees. Colleges and universities must waive tuition for participating low-income students and can offer financial assistance to other students as well. In addition, as part of the NGA honor state grant, the state awarded a number of grants of \$50,000 to school districts to develop Early College High school programs.

Indiana has also begun collecting more comprehensive data to inform its efforts. High schools must report student suspensions, dropouts, work permits revoked, driving permits revoked, School Flex enrollees, and freshmen not earning enough credits to become sophomores.

### *Massachusetts' Extended Learning Time Initiative*

In 2004, Massachusetts 2020, in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, launched the *Expanded Learning Time Initiative*, which makes significant changes to the traditional school calendar. Believing that the achievement gap won't close within the confines of the current school day and year, Massachusetts wants children, especially those at risk, to have more time to achieve proficiency with the standards-based curriculum and to have access to enrichment

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programs such as the arts, music and sports. In 2006-07, Massachusetts 2020 and the Education Department assisted the conversion of 10 elementary and middle schools in five districts to a schedule that includes 30% longer school days. The state has expanded the initiative to include 22 public schools, serving more than 12,000 students in 11 districts, and provided these schools \$17.5 million in state funding.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Massachusetts 2020, and Focus on Results, a leading national school and district improvement organization, are working together to provide technical assistance to the participating schools so that they are maximizing the additional time, and to ensure that implementation leads to improved academic outcomes. This includes bi-monthly Leadership Team Sessions, on-site coaching, district capacity building, and the sharing of best practices. According to the Mass 2020 Annual Progress Report, beginning in the 2009-2010 school year, the Department and Massachusetts 2020 have worked together to implement a formal review process that requires participating schools to define explicit, measurable objectives they seek to achieve with more time. With support from Massachusetts 2020 and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, all extended learning time schools are now required to create a Performance Agreement, which sets specific objectives for their school in three key categories:

- Academic Achievement Gains
- More Effective Teaching
- More Engaged, Well-rounded Students

Schools will be held accountable to these outcomes based on student performance and growth, as well as on-site review of school practices. The ELT Performance Agreements seek to strengthen implementation by establishing clear expectations and keeping schools, districts, state officials and support organizations like Massachusetts 2020 focused on a common set of goals.

### ***Virginia's Algebra Readiness Initiative & Project Graduation***

The goal of the *Algebra Readiness Initiative* is to provide mathematics intervention services to students who may be at risk of failing the Algebra I end-of-course test. The initiative targets students in grades 6-9 who have been unsuccessful in previous intervention/remediation program, had below average performance in the previous year's mathematics program, or did not pass the Standards of Learning (SOL) mathematics assessment test. The Algebra Readiness Initiative consists of a diagnostic pre-test (to identify student's mathematical strengths and weaknesses), an intervention service (that addresses the weaknesses through 2 ½ hours of additional weekly instruction), and a post-test.

Students take online adaptive pre- and post diagnostic tests (ARDT) to assess and diagnose student's mathematical strengths and weaknesses in relation to the Virginia Mathematics SOL and to determine growth in student skills over time. School divisions determine the intervention service model and indicate through the year-end report that the identified students participated in this intervention service. The intervention model used might be after school or on Saturdays, additional time during the school day, a summer program or some other model.

Participating school divisions are eligible for incentive payments to provide mathematics intervention services to students in the targeted grades. The incentive payments will be based on the state's share of the cost of providing 2 ½ hours of additional instruction each week at a 10:1 student-to-teacher ratio.

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School divisions receiving the incentive payments are required to match these funds based upon the composite index of local ability-to-pay.

*Project Graduation* was designed to help students prepare for the SOL exams that students must pass in order to graduate from high school. The program includes regional academies and online tutorials and practice tests. School divisions apply for state grants to serve students in need of additional support to pass SOL exams and choose appropriate Project Graduation activities to meet their needs. The state grant application recommends that priority be given to students in subgroups with low graduation rates. The initiative includes three types of remediation academies, each supported by its own block of funding.

- *Summer Academy*: offered in the summer to students entering 12th grade who are on track to having passed courses but have not earned the verified credit in English reading, English writing, and Algebra I (i.e., have passed the course, but not the end-of-instruction test).
- *Academic Year Academy*: offered during the school year to students who are on track to graduate but have not earned verified credits (i.e., have passed the course, but not the end-of-instruction test).
- *Continuation Academy*: offered in the summer to students who completed 12th grade, but have not achieved verified credits/passed the Standards of Learning EOC tests in English reading, English writing, and Algebra I.

There is programmatic flexibility at the regional level, allowing school districts to design these academies with wide latitude in to best fit their needs. Successful ideas are not isolated at the district or division level; regional Project Graduate team leaders collaborate and share best practices.