

Elementary Programs for Dropout Prevention

In this report, Hanover Research provides a review of the literature regarding dropout prevention programs initiated during elementary school. The report begins with an overview of trends and indicators related to school drop-outs that can be seen at early ages. It continues with a detailed summary of effective early intervention methods for dropout prevention. Finally, it closes by offering profiles of ten successful early intervention programs. These profiles include program descriptions, overall program strategies, associated components, targeted risk factors/target risk groups, and suggested or documented impacts.

Executive Summary

In this report, Hanover Research addresses how early intervention strategies might prevent school dropout later on in a child's development. To do this, we examine the indicators and common traits of school dropouts and detail the characteristics of successful "early intervention" dropout prevention programs. The report explores different perspectives on dropout prevention and is divided into three main sections, as detailed below.

Section I: Literature Review: The opening section introduces the primary topics of this report: school dropouts and early intervention strategies to curb school dropouts. It describes current trends, offers a theoretical framework surrounding these topics, and identifies several factors that drive dropouts.

Section II: Operating Models for Dropout Prevention: The second section provides greater detail regarding early intervention strategies to reduce school dropouts. It delves into some specific models for curbing dropouts, and discusses various approaches and costs associated with early intervention.

Section III: Successful Early Intervention Programs: The third section provides profiles of exemplary drop-out prevention programs in elementary schools, using the approaches discussed in the previous section. Here, we examine ten programs and outline their corresponding strategies, components, target risk factors/groups and impacts. The following programs are detailed in this report:

- ❖ Check and Connect
- ❖ Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program (VYP)
- ❖ Fast Track
- ❖ Good Behavior Game
- ❖ Los Angeles Better Educated Students for Tomorrow (LA's Best)
- ❖ Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)
- ❖ SOAR (Skills, Opportunities, and Recognition)
- ❖ The Incredible Years
- ❖ School Transitional Environment Project (STEP)
- ❖ Strengthening Families Program (SFP)

Key Findings

Key findings from our research include the following:

- ❖ Dropping out of school is a cumulative process that begins in primary grades, not a single event. Early intervention can curb dropouts by fostering positive

- academic and personal developments before students settle into negative academic routines.
- ❖ Overall graduation rates have fallen for the second consecutive year. Approximately 1.3 million students did not graduate last year, and a very small number of individual school systems produce a disproportionately large share of the country's dropouts.
 - ❖ Research has connected educational outcomes and economic gains, particularly in the current knowledge-based economy. The unemployment rate was more than three times higher for those without a high school diploma than those with a bachelor's degree or higher. However, states with higher unemployment rates are likely to have lower dropout rates and higher graduation rates.
 - ❖ Research shows that students exhibiting two or more risk factors are more likely to drop out, and that no single risk factor indicates who will drop out. The following is a list of identifiable factors that school districts have the ability to track, as well as those that schools have some control over:
 - Low Academic Achievement
 - Emotional/Behavioral Disorders
 - Student Mobility
 - Parenting & Family
 - High-Risk Behaviors
 - ❖ There is conflicting research on whether educational and personal factors drive dropouts. However, dropouts themselves commonly reported leaving because they didn't like school, found classes uninteresting, missed too much class, or were failing academically.
 - ❖ Districts can discern dropout patterns from collecting data on individual students throughout their educational careers at a relatively low cost. Analyzing data to develop predictors of dropping out helps districts identify groups of students displaying early warning signs of school failure. Identifying students that need early intervention can reduce later costs.
 - ❖ The following are important characteristics of school-based dropout prevention interventions because they address marginalized students who do not feel connections to their teachers, peers, and the learning process:
 - Continuous
 - Comprehensive
 - Personalized

- ❖ Specific approaches and models used in dropout prevention programs include:
 - School-Within-A-School and Behavioral Support
 - Educational Technology
 - After-School Programs
 - Tutoring and Mentoring
 - Other Early Intervention Program Models

- ❖ Depending upon the target risk factors, programs incorporate various strategies when implementing an early intervention program. Amongst the programs profiled, there are a variety of approaches. Some represent technology-based programs that can be incorporated into elementary school curriculums. Others function as tutoring and mentoring programs.

Section I: Literature Review

Dropping out of school is a cumulative process that begins in the primary grades. When students enter school, they begin to establish academic and behavioral performance patterns and form ideas about themselves in relation to school. Research has shown that it is beneficial to identify children at risk of dropout early in their educational careers. “Prospects for ‘reengagement’ later are not good” for children that experience feelings of self-doubt or alienation regarding their academics, exceed the average age of children in their classrooms, receive remedial course placements, tend towards problem behaviors, receive the label of ‘troublemaker’ or exhibit skills far below the standards for their curriculum level.¹ **Early intervention can curb dropouts by fostering positive academic and personal development before students settle into negative academic routines.**²

Drop-Out Trends

Mentioned below are several common trends amongst drop-out students:³

- ❖ Students at risk of dropping out are likely to have poor attendance, low achievement, and negative attitudes toward school.
- ❖ Students with disabilities are much more likely to drop out of school than their general-education peers.
- ❖ Dropout rates are disproportionately high for students from Hispanic, African American, Native American, and low-income backgrounds.
- ❖ Dropout rates are also correlated with parenting situations and are higher for those growing up in a single parent household.
- ❖ Dropout rates are highest among students with emotional and behavioral disabilities; according to the U.S. Department of Education half of these students dropped out of school in 1998-1999.

These items are especially distressing because job opportunities are limited for those without a high school diploma. **At a national level, the costs of dropouts are devastating, “estimated in the billions of dollars in lost revenues, welfare**

¹ Alexander, K., Entwisle, D. and Horsey, C. 1997. “From first grade forward: Early foundations of high school dropout: a Magazine of Theory and Practice.” *Sociology of Education*. 70(2): pp.87-107. p. 102.
<http://search.proquest.com/socialsciences/docview/216478802/12FF47574E36999721B/4?accountid=132487#>

² *Ibid.*

³ Christenson, S. and Thurlow, M. 2004. “School Dropouts: Prevention Considerations, Interventions, and Challenges.” *Current Directions in Psychological Science*. (13)1: pp. 36-39. p. 36.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20182903>

programs, unemployment programs, underemployment, and crime prevention and prosecution.”⁴

Furthermore, resources suggest that dropout rates are significantly higher in certain areas. A report by *Education Week* found that a “very small number of individual school systems produce a disproportionately large share of the country’s dropouts. Of the 11,000 public school systems with high schools, just 25 individual districts account for one in every five non-graduates for the entire nation.”⁵

Current Climate

Dropout prevention continues to be a serious issue in American education. **According to 2010 data, high school graduation rates have fallen for the second consecutive year. Approximately 1.3 million students did not graduate in 2010.**

Graduation rates improved steadily for most of the decade but lost ground over the past two-years.⁶ Based on the Current Population Survey (CPS), dropout rates declined from 14% in 1980 to 8% in 2008; between 2008 and 2009 the rate decreased by 3%.⁷ Graduation rates have historically been lower among minority groups and impoverished communities. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan commented on this phenomenon: “Our nation faces a dropout crisis. When 25% of our students – and almost 40% of our black and Hispanic students – fail to graduate high school on time, we know that too many of our schools are failing to offer their students a world-class education.”⁸

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-Arne Duncan

The Vice President of the Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) Research Center, Christopher Swanson, states, “The continuing decline in the nation’s graduation rate is very troubling in light of the muscular response mounted around the dropout crisis

⁴ Christenson, S. and Thurlow, M. 2004. “School Dropouts...” *Op. cit.*

⁵ Wittenstein, R. “Progress in Graduation Rate Stalls: 1.3 Million Students Fail to Earn Diplomas.” *Education Week and Editorial Projects in Education Research Center*, 10 Jun. 2010, 5. http://www.edweek.org/media/ew/dc/2010/DC10_PressKit_FINAL.pdf

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-8.

⁷ “The Condition of Education 2010.” The U.S. Department of Education, *Institute of Education Sciences. National Center for Education Statistics*. pp. 1-429. p. 68. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010028.pdf>

⁸ Downey, M. 2010. “New national dropout rates: 25 percent of all students; nearly 40 percent of black and Hispanic kids fail to graduate on time.” *Get Schooled AJC*. <http://blogs.ajc.com/get-schooled-blog/2010/06/02/new-national-dropout-rates-25-percent-of-all-students-nearly-40-percent-of-black-and-hispanic-kids-fail-to-graduate-on-time/>

in recent years. Stalled progress on a nationwide scale speaks at least as much to the deep and broad roots of the dropout problem as it does to the strength of our collective response.”⁹

Duncan provided some indication of how the educational system intends to address this issue. “With \$4 billion available for these turnarounds, we have the resources to transform these schools from dropout factories to college graduation academies. Our agenda also includes new resources to support states’ efforts to build data systems that measure whether students are on track for graduation – and how to help them if they’re not.”¹⁰ He added, “I believe that **improving our nation’s graduation rate is absolutely essential to the future of our economy and the future of our nation.**”¹¹

Research has connected educational outcomes and economic gains, which is especially important in the current knowledge-based economy. Many students need at least a high school degree to obtain employment that allows them to support themselves. This is illustrated by **the January 2011 unemployment rate, which was more than three times higher for those without a high school diploma than those with a bachelor’s degree or higher.** Research by the Alliance for Excellent Education indicates the economic need to address high school dropout rates—raising educational outcomes will not only benefit individual students; it will also improve local, state and national economies.¹² The Head of Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia, Bob Wise commented on the renewed focus on education in tough economic times. “If there’s anything good to come out of this recession, it’s to make educational lemonade out of these lemons.”¹³ In a review of 25 years of research on reasons students drop out, two studies found **“states with higher unemployment rates had lower dropout rates and higher graduation rates... for every point rise in the unemployment rate, the dropout rate fell by 5%.”**¹⁴

More than seven thousand students drop out every day across the nation, resulting in more than one million students annually that fail to graduate high school.¹⁵ In 2008, the national average of graduation for all students was 71.7%. Underscoring the relevance of these statistics, in its report titled “Public School Graduates and

⁹ Downey, M. 2010 *Op. cit.*: p. 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Alliance for Education. 2011. “Education and the Economy: Boosting the Nation’s Economy by Improving High School Graduation Rates.” *Alliance for Excellent Education*.
http://www.all4ed.org/files/NationalStates_seb.pdf

¹³ Aleccia, J. 2009. “Upside of a downturn: Dropouts drop back in.” *MSNBC*.
http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/30283579/ns/us_news-the_elkhart_project/t/upside-downturn-dropouts-drop-back/

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Alliance for Education. *Op. cit.*

Dropouts from the Common Care Data: School Year 2007-08”, the National Center for Education Statistics found that the **“dropout rates increased as grade level increased. The lowest drop-out was for grade nine while the highest level dropout was for grade 12.”**¹⁶

Table 1: Percent of Secondary Students Lost by Grade in 2008

Grade of Drop-Out	National Average
9 th	30.9%
10 th	26.5
11 th	17.3%
12 th	25.3%

Source: Education Week Research Center

Factors that Drive Dropouts

Students who drop out often cite a multitude of factors, and **there are complex interactions among these factors.**¹⁸ In a joint report issued by National Dropout Prevention Center and Community in Schools, researchers looked at studies from 1980 to 2005 to identify trends in reasons dropouts give for leaving school. These findings are illustrated further in the table below.

Table 2: Top Five Reasons Given by Dropouts for Leaving School¹⁹

1980	1988	2005
Didn't like school (33%)	Didn't like school (51%)	Classes were not interesting (47%)
Poor grades (33%)	Failing school (44%)	Missed too many days and could not catch up (43%)
Offered job and chose to work (19%)	Couldn't get along with teachers (34%)	Spent time with people who were not interested in school (42%)
Getting married (18%)	Couldn't keep up with schoolwork (31%)	Had too much freedom and not enough rules in my life (38%)
Could not get along with teachers (15%)	Felt like they didn't belong at school (25%)	Failing in school (35%)

Source: National Dropout Prevention Center/Network and Communities and School

¹⁶ Stillwell, R. 2010. “Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Care Data: School year 2007-08.” *National Center for Education Statistics*. pp. 1-34. p. 3. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010341.pdf>

¹⁸ Kennelly, L. and Monrad, M. 2007. “Approaches to Dropout Prevention: Heeding Early Warning Signs With Appropriate Interventions.” *National High School Center at the American Institutes for Research*. pp.:1-33. p. 2. http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_ApproachesToDropoutPrevention.pdf

¹⁹ Hammond et. al. 2007. “Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs: A Technical Report.” *National Dropout Prevention Center*. pp. 1-282. p.38. http://www.dropoutprevention.org/sites/default/files/uploads/major_reports/DropoutRiskFactorsandExemplaryProgramsFINAL5-16-07.pdf

The reasons for school drop-out cited in survey responses for all three survey years are primarily school-related. Dropouts commonly reported leaving because they didn't like school, found classes uninteresting, missed too much class, or lagged behind academically. These reasons can each be categorized as "disengagement." It is important to understand how students become disengaged from school both socially and academically and the order in which these attitudes develop. This has been a much-debated topic area in educational research:²⁰

One dropout study found that "64% of students who had repeated a grade in elementary school and 63% of those who had been held back in middle school left school without a diploma."

For many years, researchers focused primarily on identifying personal or family factors that dropouts tend to have in common. Several decades worth of studies have documented that dropouts are more likely to be poor, minority, and male; come from single-parent families with a mother who dropped out of high school or have parents who are less involved in school; and have adult responsibilities themselves like jobs or spouses.

However, while students with those characteristics *are more likely* to drop out, the most immediate causes for leaving school are educational. Recent research has found that both poor academic performance and educational disengagement are reliable predictors of whether students will leave high school without a diploma.

Despite the current debate regarding educational and personal factors that drive dropouts, most agree that dropping out should not be looked at as a single event, but rather viewed as a process "with factors building and compounding over time."²¹ Early drop-outs are those students who leave school between seventh and ninth grade. These early dropouts can be predicted by low grades from as far back as elementary school.²²

The literature identifies specific early risk factors that correlate with dropping out at later educational levels. **Students exhibiting two or more risk factors are more likely to drop out, but no single risk factor indicates a likely drop out.**²³ The following are factors that drive dropouts and that can also be noted in elementary school students:

- ❖ Low Academic Achievement
- ❖ Emotional/Behavioral Disorders

²⁰ Jerald, C. 2006. "Dropping Out Is Hard to Do. Issue Brief." *The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement*. pp.: 1-6. p. 2. www.centerforcsri.org/files/CenterIssueBriefJune06.pdf

²¹ Ibid.: p. 2.

²² Jerald, C. 2007. "Keeping kids in school: What research tells us about preventing dropouts." *Center for Public Education*. <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Staffingstudents/Keeping-kids-in-school-At-a-glance/Keeping-kids-in-school-Preventing-dropouts.html>

²³ Christenson, S. and Thurlow, M. Op. cit.

- ❖ Student Mobility
- ❖ Parenting & Family
- ❖ High-Risk Behaviors

Low Academic Achievement

Academic failure and frustration can lead to dropouts since they undermine a student's confidence.²⁴ Research shows the following are indicators of academic disengagement.

- ❖ Poor grades in core subjects such as math and English
- ❖ Low attendance (less than 80%)
- ❖ Failure to be promoted to the next grade
- ❖ Lack of participation in the classroom, signaled by low grades for behavior²⁵

A study of third-grade students showed “frequent school changes were associated with a host of problems, including nutrition and health problems, below grade-level reading scores, and grade retention.”

One dropout study found that 64% of students who had repeated a grade in elementary school and 63% of those who had been held back in middle school left school without a diploma.²⁶ Another study expanded upon these findings and indicated that “eighth-graders who

miss five weeks of school or fail math or English have at least a 75% chance of dropping out of high school.”²⁷

Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

Dropout rates are highest among students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. Half of such students dropped out of school in 1998-1999.²⁸ **Students with emotional and behavioral issues are more likely to drop out of school than their general-education peers.** Additionally, this group is more likely to leave school early when compared to all students with disabilities. This issue has received more attention, especially with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1997. According to this legislation, states are required to “establish performance

²⁴ Kennelly, L. and Monrad, M Op. cit.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.: p. 1.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Christenson, S. and Thurlow, M. Op. cit.

indicators to be used in assessing state progress towards reducing dropout rates among children with disabilities.”²⁹

One risk factor strongly associated with behavioral and emotional disorders is mobility and school adjustment problems. Mobility can influence a student’s developmental process due to the emotional difficulties with relocating between classrooms, schools, and districts. To make matters worse, one of the main reasons students leave school is negative social interactions. Poor social interactions and behavioral issues may lead to disciplinary actions, such as suspension and expulsion, which disrupt the learning processes of the student and subsequently contribute to dropout outcomes. Research shows that it is important that emotional and behavioral problems are not exacerbated in this way. In the last section of this report, we discuss STEP, an effective model that addresses challenges associated with emotional and behavioral disabilities.³⁰

Student Mobility

High rates of mobility impact the ability of students to feel connected to a school.³¹ Residential mobility is high in the United States, especially when compared to other developed countries. A study in the early 1990s found that 50% of U.S. students moved twice before the age of 18. Mobility is higher for Latino, African-American, and economically disadvantaged children.³² Studies have also indicated that transferring “troublemakers” is a practice schools have used when dealing with behavioral issues.³³

A study of third-grade students showed “frequent school changes were associated with a host of problems, including nutrition and health problems, below grade-level reading scores, and grade retention.”³⁴ Likewise, student mobility disrupts classroom learning and makes it more difficult for teachers to identify students’ needs in a timely and appropriate manner.

Parental and Familial Influences

Similarly, parents’ attitudes towards education can impact their children. **Research has shown that students’ dropout likelihood is influenced by their parents devaluing education.** Parents’ actions related to education are also important in

²⁹ Osher, D., Morrison, G. and Bailey, W. 2003. “Exploring the relationship between student mobility and dropout among students with emotional and behavioral disorders.” *The Journal of Negro Education*. 72(1): pp. 76-96. Citing the U.S. Department of Education.

³⁰ Osher et. al. Op. cit.

³¹ Christenson, S. and Thurlow, M. Op. cit.

³² Rumberger, R. and Larson, K. Op. cit.: p. 2.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.: p. 3.

prevention of dropout. The following parental behaviors are associated with high dropout rates:

- ❖ Minimal and infrequent contact with the school about the performance and/or behavior of their child
- ❖ Rarely talk about school with their children
- ❖ Lack of involvement in the PTA and other school activities
- ❖ Lack of homework monitoring³⁵

Overly-permissive parenting styles—such as no curfew on school nights—have also been linked to higher rates of dropout. A sibling’s academic history can also be an indicator. “If one adolescent in a family has dropped out, it increases the likelihood that his or her siblings will also leave school before graduating.”³⁶ **Research has connected high dropout rates in families with high levels of stress.** Household stress can be caused by a variety of factors, including substance abuse, financial and health problems, death, divorce, and other family conflicts.³⁷

High-Risk Behaviors

Research has also linked a variety of high-risk behaviors to dropout patterns. It has linked early sexual activity with dropouts. Additionally, **anti-social behaviors—such as violence, substance use, or trouble with the law—can indicate whether or not a student will leave schools early.**³⁸ Furthermore, antisocial behavior is associated with the low-confidence and self-esteem frequently found in students with academic failures.

Early Intervention

When developing a dropout prevention plan, districts first need to identify potential drop outs at the earliest possible time. Knowing the risk factors, discussed in the previous section, is not enough.³⁹ **Districts need to develop intervention and prevention strategies at the elementary school level.** A report by Achieve, Inc. argued that school systems should develop an **“early warning system of data collection on which to base the development of intervention.”**⁴⁰ Districts can discern dropout patterns from collecting data on individual students throughout their educational careers, so “that prevention programs can be developed to target identified students and issues.”⁴¹

³⁵ Kennelly, L. and Monrad, M. Op cit.: p. 18.

³⁶ Ibid.: p. 18.

³⁷ Ibid.: p. 18.

³⁸ Ibid.: p. 16.

³⁹ Jerald, C. “Dropping Out Is hard To Do...” Op. cit.

⁴⁰ Kennelly, L. and Monrad, M. Op. cit.: p. 23.

⁴¹ Hammond et al. Op. cit.: p. 23.

The following steps are recommended by the National High School Center at the American Institutes for Research for school communities interested in building early warning systems:⁴²

- ❖ Establish a data system that tracks individual student attendance, grades, promotion status, and engagement indicators, such as behavioral marks, as early as fourth grade;
- ❖ Determine criteria for who is considered off-track for graduation and establish a continuum of appropriate interventions;
- ❖ Track ninth grade students who miss 10 days or more of school in the first 30 days; and
- ❖ Monitor grades for information about failure rates and to see who is likely to struggle in later years.

⁴² Kennelly, L. and Monrad, M. Op. cit.: p. 1-2.

Section II: Operational Models for Dropout Prevention

In this section, Hanover identifies some specific ways in which educators exert influence over the factors that drive dropout rates. Research has shown that dropout intervention programs can reduce drop-out rates for even the **most at-risk students, provided that they are continuous, comprehensive, and personalized.**⁴³ Interventions with these characteristics address marginalized students who do not feel connections to their teachers, peers, and the learning process. The **“personalization” of education is being incorporated into an emerging intervention model.** Such a model:⁴⁴

...shows students that there is someone who is not going to give up on them or allow them to be distracted from school; that there is someone who knows them and is available to them throughout the school year, the summer, and into the next school year; and that caring adults want them to learn, do the work, attend class regularly, be on time, express frustration constructively, stay in school, and succeed.

The most effective intervention programs identify and track youth at risk for school failure, maintain a focus on students’ progress toward educational standards across the school years, and are designed to address indicators of student engagement and to impact enrollment status. Alternate routes to school completion and alternate timelines for school completion can also be addressed at an elementary level.⁴⁵ Although most dropouts occur at the high school level, intervention and tracking should not start when students enter their freshman year.

Specific Approaches

School-Within-a-School and Behavioral Support

Alternative schools have emerged to accommodate students whose educational needs are not being addressed in traditional schooling environments. For the most part, these schools cater to middle and high school students who are typically “underachieving and usually are deficient in credits to graduate or to be with their same age students.” Teenage mothers and students placed in the court system may opt for this type of alternative schooling. One model that can be adapted for elementary schools is the “School-Within-a-School” model. This refers to semiautonomous or specialized educational programs housed within the boundaries of a traditional school. This model is **“designed for students needing a separate location within the traditional school, usually a separate wing with different**

⁴³ Jerald, C. “Dropping Out Is hard To Do...” Op. cit.

⁴⁴ Christenson, S. and Thurlow, M. Op. cit.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

staff, for their academic or social behavior programs.”⁴⁶ Students displaying at-risk behaviors may be placed in a classroom more suited to their needs.

One recent study investigated whether instructional and emotional support impacts children at-risk of school failure.⁴⁷ Two University of Virginia professors looked at first graders that were identified as at-risk by their kindergarten teachers using the academic and demographic factors discussed in the previous section. The findings indicated that supportive classrooms can increase achievement scores and strengthen student-teacher relationships. **The behavioral and instructional support for this case consisted of “frequent and effective use of literacy instruction, evaluative feedback, instructional conversations, and encouragement of child responsibility.”**⁴⁸ Other elements of successful school-within-a-school programs are: high expectations for student achievement, “[a] learning program specific to the student’s expectations and learning style, a flexible school schedule with community involvement and support; and, a total commitment to have each student be a success.”⁴⁹

Educational Technology

Technology is playing an increasing role in education, and its impact on at-risk students is receiving more attention from researchers. According to Eye on Education, educational technology:⁵⁰

- ❖ Builds self-esteem
- ❖ Changes reluctant learners to motivated learners
- ❖ Empowers students
- ❖ Provides multiple and flexible learning opportunities
- ❖ Creates a psychologically safe learning environment

In addition to these benefits, **educational technology provides “an alternative method of learning for those who struggle to learn using traditional methods.”**⁵¹ It is particularly useful when eliminating the barriers at-risk students face.⁵² Specifically, technology intervention has been successful when working with English Language Learners and students with behavioral and emotional disabilities.

⁴⁶ “Alternative Schools.” *National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. Clemson University.*

<http://www.dropoutprevention.org/effective-strategies/alternative-schooling>

⁴⁷ Hamre, B. and Pianta, R. 2005. “Can Instructional and Emotional Support in the First-Grade Classroom Make a Difference for Children at Risk of School Failure?” *Child Development*. 76(5): pp. 949-967.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3696607> P. 949

⁴⁸ Ibid.: p. 961.

⁴⁹ “Alternative Schools.” Op. cit.

⁵⁰ Educational Technology. *National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. Clemson University.*

<http://www.dropoutprevention.org/effective-strategies/educational-technology>

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

After-School Programs

After-school programs are a good strategy for targeting children that are left unsupervised after the school day ends. This is an important consideration since “only 20% of a child’s waking hours are spent in school” and “the highest crime rate during the week is from 3:00-7:00 p.m.”⁵³ **The benefits of after-school programs for elementary school students can include “increased achievement, regular attendance, good behavior, and a reduction in grade retention.”**⁵⁴ Table 3 below illustrates the key elements of after-school programs.

Table 3: Elements of Effective After-School Programs⁵⁵

Program Component	Description of Activities
Academic offerings	This can include homework assistance, tutoring, hands-on learning, reading and writing enrichment.
Enrichment and accelerated learning:	This can include exposure to visual and performing arts, field trips, character education, critical thinking skills, foreign languages, and technology
Supervised recreation	This can include organized sports and sports education.
Community services	This refers to activities that connect students to the community.

Source: National Dropout Prevention Center/Network

After-school programs can also be a cost-saving strategy for educators. A report on California’s after-school programs found substantial cost savings—the state Department of Education projected 2001-2002 savings were more than \$11 million with additional savings as a result of a reduction in juvenile crime. The cost was \$1.67 per student per hour of participation and more than 100,000 youth were served.⁵⁶

Tutoring and Mentoring

There are various types of mentoring and tutoring programs. For example, peer tutoring programs are concerned **both with academic performance and with the socialization and emotional health of involved students.** Almost every possible combination of pairings in academic areas has been tried: pairings composed of both intra- and inter-school students and intra- and inter-class students.⁵⁷ However, when dealing with different youth groups, the most effective tutoring programs utilize mentoring aspects. Mentoring programs have been particularly effective with youth in

⁵³ “After-school opportunities.” *National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. Clemson University.*
<http://www.dropoutprevention.org/effective-strategies/after-school-opportunities>

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Turkel, A. and Abramson, T. 1986. “Peer Tutoring and Mentoring as a Drop-Out Prevention Strategy.” *The Clearing House*. 60 (2): pp. 68-71.

at-risk situations.⁵⁸ Table 4 below illustrates the benefits of mentoring programs. These findings are from a nationwide study of programs collected by The Commonwealth Fund's survey.

Table 4. Results of mentoring programs from a nationwide study⁵⁹

Type of Improvement	Percent of Students Reporting Improvement
Increased self-esteem	62%
Skipped less school	52%
Improved grades	48%
Less trouble in school	49%
Less trouble out of school	47%
Reduced substance abuse	45%
Improved family relationships	35%

Source: National Prevention Center/Network

For potential drop-outs, academic progress is more likely to take place when it is fused to a positive self-concept.⁶⁰ When developing a mentoring program to prevent dropouts, there should be comprehensive training for mentors and well-defined evaluation processes. In addition, the National Dropout Prevention Center has stated that program planners need to clearly state the program's purposes and goals and have a recruitment plan for the mentors. The following are some of the recognized best practices for effective mentors:⁶¹

- ❖ Involve youth in deciding how time will be spent
- ❖ Commitment and dependability, so the mentor can be a steady presence
- ❖ Dual responsibility for keeping an on-going relationship
- ❖ Realize fun is a valuable part of the relationship
- ❖ Respect for the youth's viewpoints
- ❖ Assistance and advice from program staff when needed.

Other Early Intervention Program Models

Outside of these specific programs, various other initiatives may be taken to reduce the risk of student drop out. Early literacy development is one effective strategy to curb future dropouts. **Elementary school students that have difficulty reading at proficiency level are likely to become frustrated and disengaged.** The National Dropout Prevention Center recommends early intervention for students struggling

⁵⁸ "Mentoring/Tutoring." *National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. Clemson University.*
<http://www.dropoutprevention.org/effective-strategies/mentoring/tutoring>

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Turkel, A. and Abramson, T. 1986. *Op. cit.*

⁶¹ "Mentoring/Tutoring." *Op. Cit.*

with reading and writing. Such interventions should be coordinated “with regular classroom instruction so that they complement each other.”⁶²

Creating partnerships between homes and schools can result in improved family engagement. **Research has shown that how children spend their time at home is the strongest predictor of school success.** Effective home learning activities include homework, reading, and using the dictionary. The benefits of active family engagement include higher student achievement, positive behavior, and lower likelihood of dropping out. When parents are involved in their children’s education and create home environments that foster learning, academic achievement is likely to result despite income and social status discrepancies.⁶³

Dropout Program Costs

Districts and school are pursuing more cost-effective ways to invest resources in dropout prevention. By analyzing early childhood data to develop predictors of helps districts identify groups of students displaying early warning signs of school failure. These group or cohort analyses can be relatively inexpensive and conducted by gathering information from the files that all school systems maintain on their students. Identifying students that need early intervention can reduce costs down the line.⁶⁴

Of course, no risk factor or set of risk factors can ever be 100% accurate at predicting who will drop out. Say that the Chicago Public Schools decided to provide targeted assistance to all off-track students at the end of ninth grade. Since about 30,000 freshmen enter Chicago high schools each year and about 58 percent of them fall off track, that means the program would provide interventions to over 17,370 students. If the interventions cost an average of \$350 per off-track student, the system would need to budget \$6,079,500 total. Of that, \$1,337,490 (or 22 percent) would have been spent on false positives, students who didn’t need the extra help because they would have graduated even without it.

According to a 2011 report by the Alliance for Excellent Education, a decrease in dropouts translates to a substantial savings, even in the face of state budget costs. If all 50 states and the District of Columbia prevented 1,000 students from dropping out, these 51,000 graduates would have the following economic impacts:⁶⁵

- ❖ Gross \$554 million in additional earnings in an average year
- ❖ Spend an additional \$57 million each year purchasing vehicles

⁶² “Early Literacy Development.” *National Dropout Prevention Center/Network*. *Clemson University*.
<http://www.dropoutprevention.org/effective-strategies/early-literacy-development>

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ “Policy Brief: Improving Graduation Rates: Data-Driven Dropout Prevention.” *Achieve, Inc.*
<http://www.achieve.org/files/DataDrivenDropoutPreventionPolicy.pdf>

⁶⁵ Alliance for Education. *Op. cit.*

- ❖ Buy homes worth \$1.4 billion more than what they would likely have spent without a diploma
- ❖ Support 3,800 new jobs
- ❖ Increase the gross domestic product by \$681 million,
- ❖ Add an additional \$50 million annually into state coffers, all through their increased spending and investments

Section III: Successful Early Intervention Programs

In this section, Hanover offers profiles of successful early intervention programs—including details such as the programs’ overall strategies and target risk factors. These exemplary programs all specifically target elementary school students or have been adapted for use in elementary schools. Where available, information regarding the program costs are also included. Due to the different types of program structure and limited amount of available information, pricing is reported as it appears on the given program’s website rather than in a standardized form. For additional information, the profiles on the following pages offer hyperlinks to online resources for each program.

Overall, successful dropout prevention programs incorporate these key components:⁶⁶

- ❖ Attendance and behavior monitors
- ❖ Tutoring, mentoring, and counseling
- ❖ Establishment of small learning communities for greater personalization
- ❖ Engaging catch-up courses
- ❖ Homerooms
- ❖ Benchmarking
- ❖ Progress monitoring
- ❖ Tiered interventions
- ❖ Focus on equal access to rigorous coursework and high expectations
- ❖ Family and community engagement
- ❖ Grade transitions

Depending upon the target risk factors, programs may incorporate several of the key elements listed above. The programs profiled offer a variety of approaches: some are technology-based programs that can be incorporated into elementary school curriculums while others are tutoring and mentoring programs. Still others aim to facilitate parental engagement. For ease-of-access to program-related information the title of each program below is linked to its corresponding Website (click title to visit site).

Check and Connect⁶⁷

Check & Connect is a dropout prevention model developed by the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota, in partnership with a variety of “researchers, practitioners, parents and students.” It offers a “data-driven”

⁶⁶ Kennelly, L. and Monrad, M. *Op. cit.*: p. 2.

⁶⁷ Hammond, C. et al. *Op. cit.*: p. 218-263.

monitoring/mentoring model that uses sustained relationships (built over the course of two or more years) to foster student engagement.

Strategy

Through Check & Connect, a mentor is assigned to a “caseload of students and families” with whom they work over the course of several years. Mentors engage students by “checking” in with them regularly regarding their attendance, grades, and suspensions. Measuring attendance is a particularly important element of the checking in process, and mentors typically check their students’ attendance daily or weekly. Meanwhile, the “connecting” component of Check & Connect involves mentor-led monitoring of feedback on student progress, training in cognitive-behavioral problem-solving, and intensive interventions for those students showing high risk on indicators.

Components

Check & Connect has several key components that help make the program successful. A few noteworthy examples include the following:

- ❖ Program manual and staff development materials
- ❖ Monitor serving up to 50 students
- ❖ Daily or weekly monitoring sheets
- ❖ Data entry and analysis of monitoring sheets
- ❖ Parent and student outreach rewards
- ❖ Program coordinator to supervise and train monitors
- ❖ Regular meetings between monitor and referred students

Target Risk Factors

Risk factors specifically targeted by Check & Connect include the following:

- ❖ Low-achievement
- ❖ Poor attendance
- ❖ Learning disabilities
- ❖ Emotional disturbances

Impact

Noted impacts of Check & Connect include:

- ❖ Decreased truancy;
- ❖ Decreased absenteeism;

- ❖ Decreased dropout rates; and
- ❖ Increased credit accruals.

Costs

The two primary costs associated with Check & Connect are the cost for training manuals, \$40 each (for 20+ manuals), and the cost of on-site trainings.

Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program⁶⁸

The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is yet another mentoring program, although this model involves students mentoring students (i.e. older at-risk students serving as mentors to younger at-risk students).

Strategy

This program employs a unique approach to engaging youth from multiple age groups. It places secondary school youth “who are considered at risk of dropping out” as tutors to elementary school students as a way to keep both groups of students engaged in their education.

Components

There are several elements that help to make the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program successful. Activities offered through the program include peer tutoring, educational field trips, parent meetings, and training and enrichment activities for staff. The program trains older students to serve as role models to younger students, thus reinforcing and encouraging positive academic behaviors amongst the older students and correspondingly modeling such behaviors to the younger students. For tutors, training and technical assistance lasts for approximately 10 days, and for both tutors and tutees tutoring sessions last for about four hours per week. All tutors are expected to complete a minimum of 30 class sessions; however, existing school staff remain involved along the way to help with implementation. One other notable characteristic of the program is that tutors are required to be four (or more) years older than the students that they tutor.

Target Risk Factors

The risk factors that the Coca-Cola program targets include:

- ❖ Low achievement;

⁶⁸ Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program. Intercultural Development Research Association Website. http://www.idra.org/Coca-Cola_Valued_Youth_Program.html/

- ❖ Lack of effort;
- ❖ Low commitment to school; and
- ❖ No extracurricular participation.

Impact

Impacts of the Coca-Cola program noted on its Website include:

- ❖ Higher reading grades;
- ❖ Better attitudes toward school;
- ❖ Lower dropout rates; and
- ❖ Retention of 98% of tutors (i.e. they stayed in school).

Costs

No costing information was available for this particular program.

Fast Track⁶⁹

Fast Track is a comprehensive and long-term prevention program to prevent chronic and severe conduct problems with intensive interventions at school entry and from elementary to middle school.

Strategy

Fast Track is a two-pronged effort to prevent dropouts that begins in elementary school. It involves both tutoring for academics and training in social and behavioral issues. The program has both an elementary phase (grades 1-5) and an adolescent phase (grades 6-10). Specifically, the elementary phase targets “classroom, school risk, and family risk factors, including communication between parent[s] and schools.” Meanwhile, the adolescent phase includes youth and family activities and curriculum-based parent and youth meetings, to ease the middle school transition.

Components

According to the Fast Track Website, the program’s elementary phase involves six components. These include:

- ❖ A “teacher-led classroom curriculum called PATHS,” which focuses on emotional and social development and self-control; and
- ❖ Five different types of programs:

⁶⁹ Fast Track Project Website. <http://www.fasttrackproject.org/>

- Training for parents that aims to improve “family-school relationships” and increase parents’ knowledge about behavior management
- Home visits that boost parents’ “problem-solving skills, self-efficacy, and life management”
- Small group-based social skills training
- Reading tutoring
- “Peer pairing,” i.e. targeted friendship building activities

Target Risk Factors

Factors targeted by Fast Track include the following:

- ❖ Learning disability or emotional disturbance
- ❖ Misbehavior
- ❖ Early aggression
- ❖ Low family contact with school

Impact

Below are some noted impacts of Fast Track:

- ❖ Significantly lower rates of special education assignment
- ❖ Significantly lower serious conduct problems
- ❖ Improvement in aggression and oppositional behavior
- ❖ Participating parents showed more involvement in school activities

Costs

A variety of federal agencies and institutes, such as the National Institute of Mental Health, have helped to fund Fast Track. Specific costs associated with the program are not detailed on its Website.

Good Behavior Game^{70,71}

Good Behavior Game (GBG) is a classroom, team-based, behavior modification program that utilizes a group-based approach in which students are assigned specific units and cannot advance until a majority of the class has mastered the previous set of learning objectives. It is currently maintained by the American Institutes for Research.

⁷⁰ “Good Behavior Game Research, Training, and Support.” American Institutes for Research. http://www.air.org/focus-area/education/index.cfm?fa=viewContent&content_id=785&cid=1

⁷¹ “Behavior Game Played in Primary Grades Reduces Later Drug-Related Problems.” NIDA Notes, 23:1, pp. 1 and 2. National Institutes of Health, 2010. http://www.air.org/files/NIDA_Notes_April_2010.pdf

Strategy

GBG encourages team-work amongst students to foster a “positive learning environment” where students “monitor their own behavior as well as that of their classmates.” It utilizes local coaches who help train teachers in the GBG approach and AIR representatives who work closely with schools and districts to facilitate its implementation.

Components

“Four core elements” comprise the GBG approach. These include two initial steps: 1) rule setting by the teachers and 2) the division of students into teams. Once the teams are established and the students are aware of the rules, play begins, intermittently at first. The two additional components of the program, employed once the game is in play, are 3) the regular monitoring of classroom behavior (by the teacher) and 4) the awarding of prizes to teams exhibiting good behavior.⁷²

Target Risk Factors

GBG targets early elementary children, aged six to ten. It also targets children with high-risk social behaviors, regular misbehavior, and signs of early aggression.

Impact

Stated impacts of the GBG program include:

- ❖ Reduction in conduct disorders;
- ❖ Decreased need of mental health services;
- ❖ Fewer suspensions; and
- ❖ Lower levels of aggression.

Costs

No costing information for GBG was readily available.

Los Angeles Better Students for Tomorrow⁷³

Los Angeles Better Students for Tomorrow (LA’s Best) is an after-school education and enrichment program created as a partnership between the City of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Unified School District and the private sector.

⁷² Program components were pulled from “Behavior Game Played in Primary Grades Reduces Later Drug-Related Problems...” *Op. cit.*

⁷³ LA’s Best Website. <http://www.lasbest.org/>

Strategy

LA's Best has five overarching goals that are achieved through a variety of programmatic aims. Its five goals include the following:

- ❖ Fostering a safe environment for students
- ❖ Offering enhanced opportunities for learning and student development
- ❖ Providing educational enrichment
- ❖ Facilitating recreational activities
- ❖ Building students interpersonal skills and self-esteem

LA's Best employs both academically-focused and recreationally-focused activities throughout the school year. Specifically, it provides opportunities for tutoring in such areas as literacy, math, and science; it incorporates arts and fitness based activities; and it creates a club-based environment for student recreation. Families are also incorporated into LA's Best through activities and workshops, such as an annual Family Brunch.

Components

LA's Best is offered from the end of the school day until 6 p.m., five days per week. It is staffed by a full-time program director, playground workers, small-group leaders, high school student workers, and volunteers. Students can participate at no cost; however, they are admitted on a first-come, first-served basis. Throughout the program's duration, students must meet a minimum attendance requirement.

Target Risk Factors

LA's Best targets specific at-risk groups, these include:

- ❖ Elementary schools in the inner-city;
- ❖ Neighborhoods with high gang or crime rates;
- ❖ Students with low academic achievement;
- ❖ Students with poor attendance;
- ❖ Students not involved in extracurricular activities;
- ❖ Students with low educational expectations; and
- ❖ Areas that exhibit low school commitment.

Impact

Students involved in LA's Best exhibit the following characteristics:

- ❖ Fewer absences

- ❖ Higher achievement on standardized tests
- ❖ Greater enjoyment of school
- ❖ Higher expectations of how far they might go in school

Costs

Hanover was unable to find costing information for LA's Best.

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies⁷⁴

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) is a multiyear, comprehensive program that promotes emotional and social competencies through cognitive-skill building and reduces aggression and behavior problems while simultaneously enhancing the educational process in elementary school classrooms.

Strategy

PATHS focuses upon developing children's social and emotional learning (SEL) skills through a guided learning curriculum. It is typically initiated when students first enter school and continued throughout elementary school. The PATHS program involves 30-minute lesson plans with specific embedded objectives and outside-the-classroom activities meant to be employed by parents. It teaches students to identify, understand and self-regulate their emotions.

Components

PATHS is a full 131-lesson curriculum, which is administered through 20-30 minute segments per-day, three to five days per week. Materials for the program include instructor's and curriculum manuals, parent letters, handouts, and home activities. PATHS teachers are typically offered a two-day training session and receive support throughout the program's duration from their school or district administration or an on-site coordinator.

Target Risk Factors

The PATHS curriculum was especially developed for students exhibiting learning disabilities, behavioral and emotional disabilities, classroom misbehavior, and/or early aggression.

⁷⁴ PATHS Program. Channing Bete Company Website. <http://www.channing-bete.com/prevention-programs/paths/paths.html>

Impact

Suggested impacts of the PATHS program include:

- ❖ Reduction in teen pregnancies
- ❖ Increased academic and functional skills
- ❖ Increased student educational expectations
- ❖ Increased likelihood of attending post-secondary schools

Costs

Specific costs associated with the PATHS curriculum are as follow:

- ❖ Preschool classroom module: starting at \$799 per classroom
- ❖ First grade module: starting at \$599 per classroom
- ❖ Second grade module: starting at \$449 per classroom
- ❖ Third grade module: starting at \$399 per classroom
- ❖ Fourth grade module: starting at \$449 per classroom
- ❖ Counselor's packages:
 - Premier: starting at \$2,699 and including modules for grades Pre-K-4;
 - Standard: starting at \$1,899 and including grades 1-4

Skills, Opportunities, and Recognition (SOAR)⁷⁵

SOAR is a multidimensional intervention designed to decrease juveniles' problem behaviors by working with children and their parents and teachers.

Strategy

This program, sometimes referred to as the Seattle Social Development Project, offers social skills training for elementary students. Its outcomes have now been measured for 20+ years, and include measurements of students at age 18 (post-intervention).

Components

SOAR is a proactive classroom management approach that involves interactive teaching, cooperative learning, and parent training exercises. Teachers participating in the program are trained in classroom management techniques and parents are trained in working with children in a developmentally-sequenced manner.

⁷⁵ SOAR (Skills, Opportunities, and Recognition). National Dropout Prevention Center/Network Website. http://www.dropoutprevention.org/modelprograms/show_program.php?pid=52

Target Risk Factors

SOAR targets children falling into the following categories:

- ❖ High-risk
- ❖ Children of young parents
- ❖ Low achieving
- ❖ Exhibiting high-risk social behaviors
- ❖ Exhibiting a lack of effort
- ❖ Misbehaving

Impact

Documented impacts of SOAR include the following:

- ❖ Improvement in commitment and attachment to school
- ❖ Improvement in self-reported achievement
- ❖ Improvement in self-reported involvement in school misbehavior
- ❖ Lower likelihood of committing violent delinquent acts
- ❖ Lower likelihood of heavy alcohol use
- ❖ Lower likelihood of teen pregnancy

Costs

Specific costs related to SOAR were not available.

The Incredible Years⁷⁶

The Incredible Years is a parent, teacher and child training program that aims to address misconduct issues early-on in children's educations and to inform misbehavior prevent strategies across schools and families.

Strategy

The Incredible Years features three comprehensive, multifaceted, developmentally-based curricula for parents, teachers, and children to promote emotional and social competence and prevent at-risk behaviors. In all three training programs, facilitators use videotaped scenes to structure content and stimulate group discussion and problem-solving.

⁷⁶ The Incredible Years Website. <http://www.incredibleyears.com/>

Components

The following are amongst the core components of The Incredible Years' approach:

- ❖ Three primary curricula
- ❖ 18 to 22 weekly sessions for children
- ❖ 60 classroom lessons
- ❖ Approximately 24 parenting group sessions
- ❖ 14 teacher training sessions
- ❖ Trained co-leaders
- ❖ Administrative support

Target Risk Factors

This program targets children aged two to eight who are at-risk for and/or presently exhibiting conduct problems, a lack of effort, or low family involvement in school activities.

Impact

The impacts corresponding to The Incredible Years include:

- ❖ Increased engagement in school activities;
- ❖ Reduced aggression in the classroom;
- ❖ Increased positive interactions with peers;
- ❖ Reduced conduct problems at school; and
- ❖ Increased involvement with teachers and classrooms.

Costs

The cost of The Incredible Years is \$1,300 for its seven DVD school-aged package, intended for children ages six to 12. A Spanish/English combination version of the package is also available for \$1,600.

School Transitional Environment Project⁷⁷

The School Transitional Environment Project (STEP) is based on the transitional life events model, which theorizes that stressful life events, such as making transitions between schools, place children at risk for maladaptive behavior.

⁷⁷ Sample Dropout Intervention Program: School Transitional Environment Project (STEP). National Center on Secondary Education and Transition.
<http://www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/dropout/part3.3.09.asp>

Strategy

STEP creates small “cohorts” of transitioning students who remain together for core classes and homerooms. These cohorts are designed so that students will form community bonds with classmates and so that classrooms are thus less likely to have conflicts. Additionally, STEP redefines the role of the homeroom teacher and that of counselors to provide greater support to students.

Components

STEP classrooms are located close together. The cohorts of students typically involve somewhere from 65 to 100 students. In the STEP model, homeroom teachers serve as the primary link between the student and the home and the school and the home. At school STEP students receive individual 15 to 20-minute monthly counseling and their homeroom teachers meet once or twice per week to discuss potential problems or concerns. Each homeroom teacher has between 20 and 30 students and is responsible for checking in with their assigned students’ other teachers to track their progress and attendance.

Target Risk Factors

STEP targets students in transition from elementary to middle schools and students exhibiting the following:

- ❖ High-risk social behavior
- ❖ Low achievement
- ❖ Poor attendance
- ❖ Low educational expectations
- ❖ Low commitment to school
- ❖ Misbehavior

Impact

Associated impacts include:

- ❖ Positive feelings about the school environment;
- ❖ Higher grades;
- ❖ Fewer absences;
- ❖ Fewer increases in substance abuse and delinquent acts;
- ❖ Less teacher-reported behavior problems;
- ❖ Higher academic expectations; and
- ❖ Lower dropout rates.

Costs

Costs for the STEP program include required training for homeroom teachers to enable them to perform the expanded job roles of STEP.

Strengthening Families Program⁷⁸

Strengthening Families is a family therapy program that involves weekly skill-building sessions for elementary school children and their families. The program uses family systems and cognitive behavioral approaches to increase resilience and reduce risk factors.

Strategy

This program seeks to improve family relationships, parenting skills, and youth's social and life skills.

Components

The Strengthening Families approach involves seven sessions, with children and parents working separately for one hour and then together for a second hour. After the primary course, three hour booster sessions are offered at the six-month mark. Under this model there are generally four group leaders, with four to 14 families per group. There is also a part-time site coordinator, who offers support to group leaders. For coordinators and group leaders, a two- to three-day training is standard for the program. Other associated components include the provision of family meals, transportation and child care.

Target Risk Factors

Strengthening Families targets families of elementary school children with diverse backgrounds (minority, rural, Spanish-speaking) and exhibiting any of the following:

- ❖ Learning disabilities
- ❖ High-risk social behavior
- ❖ Early aggression

Impact

Impacts associated with Strengthening Families include:

- ❖ Clinically significant decreases in conduct disorders;

⁷⁸ Strengthening Families Program Website. <http://www.strengtheningfamiliesprogram.org/index.html>

- ❖ Significant decreases in aggression;
- ❖ Significant decreases in delinquency; and
- ❖ Decreased substance use.

Costs

Master Strengthening Families sets on CD are currently priced at \$450.

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