

Washington, DC Dropout Prevention Planning Committee Overview Report for Grad Nation Action Forum September 2009

Collaborative Overview

The Washington, DC APA Dropout Prevention Planning Committee is co-led by the DC Education Compact (DCEC) and Communities In Schools of the Nation's Capital (CISDC). Both organizations are independent non-profits working to provide supports for quality public education for all children and the academic success of all children.

The Planning Committee involves representatives of 25 community-based organizations and public education agencies and meets every four to six weeks to plan coordinated drop out prevention activities – with a focus on parent and family involvement of middle-school-level students.

The Planning Committee began meeting in the fall of 2008 and explored several options for collaborative dropout prevention work prior to settling on the three-phase design described below. Over a period of months, membership of the Committee grew to include all of the key public education agencies and wide representation of community-based organizations, and it reached its current membership status in early spring 2009. The focus on parental and family involvement grew out of the recognition of a long-standing need to involve parents and families in education concerns in a meaningful and knowledgeable way, and to coordinate the activities of the many separate and independent parent involvement activities already in existence for greater impact and change.

About Our Work

Focus areas for our work:

The Washington, DC APA Planning Committee is organizing community-based organizations in alliance with the public education agencies in support of coordinated and aligned dropout prevention activities. The District of Columbia is undergoing a radical school reform effort, led by the Mayor and the Chancellor of DC Public Schools (DCPS), with a focus on developing a high-quality school system in which students graduate ready for success in college or a career path. These efforts are centered on school-driven initiatives, with limited parental involvement. The APA Planning Committee is focusing on developing parental and family awareness of early warning signs of dropouts, connecting parents and families to resources and programs to help them support their children staying in school and succeeding in school, and developing a strong community-based culture of successful high school graduates prepared for further education and successful adulthood.

The majority of DCPS students live in the lowest socio-economic areas of the city, many of whom were born to mothers who did not complete high school and are living in single-parent

households. Consequently, a majority of DC students live and attend school in an environment that does not provide a strong, supportive culture of success in high school or aspirations for high achievement. In short, many students come from homes where parents want the best for their children but are unequipped to provide them the expectations, support or guidance for academic success and achievement they may need.

Key Initiatives and Programs:

The DC APA Dropout Prevention Planning Committee has developed a three-phase plan for developing broad-based community awareness and support for dropout prevention and increased high school graduation.

- **Phase One** – The APA Dropout Prevention Planning Committee is working with the DC Parent Information Resource Center (DC PIRC) on the Family Education Expo (FEE) on September 12, 2009. This is a full day public fair of education and youth development programs, resources and supports for parents and families. At the FEE, under the leadership of the DC Education Compact, the Planning Committee is hosting a Graduation Center, involving all Planning Committee participant organizations. Parents and families will receive a tip sheet on early warning signs of school dropout and an opportunity to learn more about supportive resources available and make connections with helpful organizations, and be able to sign up to participate in Phase Two.
- **Phase Two** – Working with DC community-based organizations that provide training and support programs for parents and families throughout the city, the APA Dropout Prevention Committee will continue to share information on warning signs of potential dropouts and connect them to appropriate resources. The Committee will also connect with parents and family members who self-select to work on a planning committee for Phase Three activities. At this stage the Committee will also begin to engage the business community
- **Phase Three** – In the first quarter of 2010, the DC APA Dropout Prevention Planning Committee, now involving parents and community members, will conduct a summit or other community-wide event to connect the dropout prevention related work of other sectors of the community and will develop a comprehensive plan for dropout prevention and high school graduation that coordinates with the school-led school reform efforts.

Resources Needed to Bring Our Work to Scale

- Other Resources – Financial resources for: dedicated staff, materials development, convening, summit planning, and summit implementation; Marketing and Communication; Funding Development

Questions & Challenges for Consideration

1. While it is widely acknowledged across the District that the high school dropout rate is extremely high, the current education reform initiatives – in the schools, public education agencies, community-based organizations, and the community as a whole – do not define the key educational concern as one of high school dropouts. The community defines the problem as one rooted in expectations, accountability on all levels, and quality of schools and teachers. Consequently, DC faces a challenge of making dropout prevention a dominant and catalyzing cross-sector shared interest for the whole community. What insights or suggestions do other communities have for doing this?
2. How have other communities conducted a community-wide summit on limited and already over-stretched human and financial resources?

Appendix A: Washington, DC Dropout Prevention Planning Committee Member List

Convener: Donna Power Stowe, DC Education Compact and Tobeka Green, Communities in Schools of the Nation’s Capital

Member Organizations

American Academy of Pediatrics
Corporation for National and Community Service
City Year
Communities In Schools of the Nation's Capital
Critical Exposure/S.T.E.P. Up DC
DC Alliance of Youth Advocates
DC Children & Youth Investment Trust Corporation
DC City Council
DC College Success Foundation
DC Parent Information and Resource Center
DC Public Schools
DCPS, Family and Community Engagement
DCPS, Office of the Chancellor, Parent Resource Center
Greater DC Cares
Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education
Serve DC
State Farm Insurance
YMCA DC

Appendix B: Demographics & Statistics, DC Public Schools and Public Charter Schools

- Roughly 47,000 students are enrolled in DCPS
- 55.6% of students are economically disadvantaged
- 6.7% are English Language Learners
- 13.6% are students with disabilitiesⁱ
- Graduation Rate: 57.6% in 2004-05ⁱⁱ

ⁱ DCPS Budget, <http://www.k12.dc.us/about/budget-SY-2009-2010/documents/DCPS-Budget-Set-Aside-FAQ-May-21-2009.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Swanson, Christopher B., *Cities in Crisis 2009: Closing the Graduation Gap* (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center)