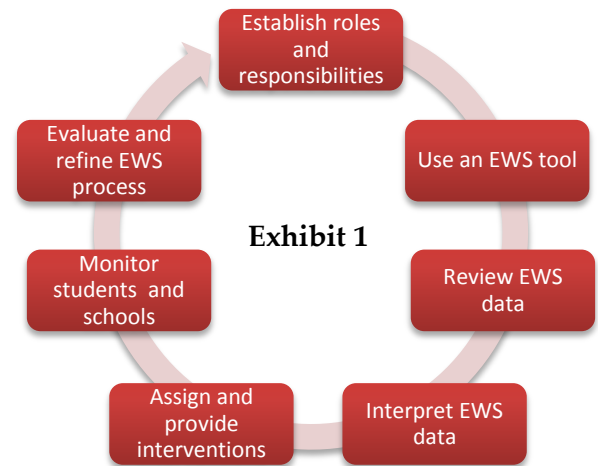


Early Warning Systems: Ideas & Examples for Implementation

Early Warning System Implementation Overview

An Early Warning System uses indicators to identify students at risk of not graduating high school, with the ultimate goal of providing them with additional supports to help them get back on track. Research indicates that student attendance and course performance, especially in core courses, are the strongest predictors of students' later success.¹

Once schools or districts have developed a set of early warning indicators, they need to determine how to use them. For example, the implementation process (Exhibit 1) guides users to make informed decisions about supporting high-risk students, monitoring their progress over time, examining the success of specific supports and identifying possible systemic issues that may relate to dropout trends.² In addition, schools and districts may use Early Warning System data to organize and budget for interventions, consistently identify and address problems at the school and student levels, and monitor whether an entire school is on track to improving graduation rates. Finally, an Early Warning System may provide access to ongoing data (as opposed to end-of-year test scores) to assess the efficacy of strategies, share data among classroom teachers, principals and counselors, and engage students, parents, educators and policymakers.



Linking Early Warning Indicators to Supports

Dropout prevention supports are most effective when they are systematically applied and well-coordinated. Examples of supports include: counseling, mentoring, small learning communities, catch-up courses, and partnerships between high schools and middle schools for transitioning 9th grade students. Schools and districts often organize strategies or programs into tiers based on intervention intensity. A common model includes three tiers:

1. **School-wide supports** may provide students with consistent attention to their progress and support at critical junctures. Such strategies can include ninth-grade transition strategies, strong behavior and attendance policies, or school wide incentives for meeting certain goals.
2. **Supports for groups of students** who struggle with similar challenges can include focusing on certain subject areas, creating smaller learning communities, instituting mentor programs or restructuring schedules to allow teachers more time to interact with individual students.
3. **Intensive or personalized supports** may include individual counseling, tutoring, behavior contracts or checklists, or the involvement of parents, social workers or psychologists.

¹ For more information, see JGC's "Using Early Warning Systems to Predict and Prevent Dropout" Policy Factsheet. <http://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/>

² Adapted from: Therriault, S. B., Heppen, J., O'Cummings, M., Fryer, L., & Johnson, A. (2010). *Early Warning Systems Implementation Guide*. Washington, DC: National High School Center.

Implementation of Select Early Warning Systems across the United States

Philadelphia: In Philadelphia, middle school students are identified as high-risk based on poor attendance, poor behavior, a failing grade in math, or a failing grade in English. Prevention and intervention plans address each factor through the three-tiered support system described above. School-wide supports include student advisories, consistent responses beginning with the student's first unexcused absence, and instructional programs aimed at improving students' skills. Group level supports include daily attendance check-ins, behavior checklists brought to each class, or academic intervention classes. Individualized support includes in-depth behavioral assessments, one-on-one tutoring, and referrals to appropriate social services. The school district also added an early warning indicators section to its data system so teachers can view continually updated student profiles and meet with teachers who share students to monitor progress and track interventions.³

Louisiana: Using data from a district-wide system, Louisiana's Abbeville High School developed an Early Warning System and a five-level support system that includes a comprehensive program for all ninth-grade students, known as the Freshman Academy. High-risk students are identified from a data system-generated report every three weeks using warning indicators, such as discipline, attendance, overall GPA and decline in GPA. Armed with this information, educators then provide these students with a variety of progressively intense supports, including mandatory tutoring, staff and student mentors, and increased levels of communication with families. In its first full year of implementation, the combined use of the early warning system and the Freshman Academy decreased the number of ninth graders who were not promoted to tenth grade by 50%.⁴

Chicago: In Chicago Public Schools, the district's central office analyzes students' historical data on attendance, grades, age, and discipline record and provides each school with a list of high-risk students. The school combines this information and school-based data, including extracurricular activities, parent engagement information, and academic and discipline records, to develop a support strategy for each student. These strategies address parent engagement, connection to the school community, and social, emotional and academic support.⁵

Sioux Falls: In Sioux Falls, district researchers identified three categories of risk factors for their students: 1) receiving a semester grade of F in two or more classes or exiting from an Individualized Education Plan at the middle school level, 2) moving into the district in grade 5 or later and multiple moves to schools in and/or out of the district, and 3) more than 10 absences in a year. Using this data, the school district developed a tiered support system. During this process, the district also discovered that its policy to suspend students with excessive absences from school actually had an adverse effect on students since district research indicated that academic performance steadily declined as the number of absences increased. In response, the district amended its policy to require students with excessive absences to spend time before and after school making up the missed assignments.⁶

³ Pinkus, L. (2008). *Using Early-Warning Data to Improve Graduation Rates: Closing Cracks in the Education System*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008. Retrieved July 11, 2011 from <http://www.all4ed.org/files/EWI.pdf>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Hauser, R. and Koenig, J.A. (2011). *High School Dropout, Graduation, and Completion Rates: Better Data, Better Measures, Better Decisions*. National Academies Press. Retrieved July 2011 from http://books.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=13035