



News Release

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Flanagan Announces Statewide Challenge to Help Prevent Students from Dropping Out

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LANSING -- State Superintendent of Public Instruction Mike Flanagan today announced a statewide *Superintendent's Dropout Challenge* to Michigan's 4,000 public schools that could impact nearly 60,000 students at-risk of dropping out of school.

"Today, one out of every four Michigan children fails to graduate with their class," said Flanagan. "This challenge is the first step in helping thousands of Michigan students stay in school."

The challenge draws on research that shows most students send distress signals years before they drop out of school. Early warning signs displayed by students nearing or entering transitional school years, such as 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th grades or beyond, have been proven to be strong dropout predictors.

Flanagan said that the dropout problem isn't just a high school problem, it is incubated at grade levels way before high school.

"This is a national, state, district, building, teacher, student, parent and community concern, as well," Flanagan said. "To turn the tide, we must think differently and build a shared vision to support and engage students so they are able to succeed, not drop out of school."

Administrators and teachers believe an early warning system can play an important role in systematically reducing student dropouts, according to *On the Front Lines of Schools*, a study released this month by Civic Enterprises for the America's Promise Alliance and AT&T Foundation.

Each Michigan school committing to the Dropout Challenge will be asked to use their existing student achievement, retention, attendance and behavior data to identify 10-15 students with multiple early warning dropout signs and provide appropriate research-based supports and interventions. The challenge also could help these schools meet federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements under No Child Left Behind and engage both parents and the community in participating in a comprehensive dropout solution.

Michigan's *Superintendent's Dropout Challenge* has received accolades from the nation's premier advocate addressing the dropout dilemma – America's Promise Alliance, a cross-sector partnership of more than 300 corporations, nonprofits, faith-based organizations and advocacy groups that are passionate about improving lives and changing outcomes for children.

“As overwhelming as the graduation crisis is, the good news is that it is also solvable if we invest the time, resources and attention necessary to those young people most at-risk,” said Marguerite Kondracke, president and CEO of America's Promise Alliance. “Michigan's dropout challenge is a perfect example of the kind of innovative initiative that will go a long way in helping reduce dropout rates.”

Early warning signs of potential school dropouts include:

Poor grades in core subjects

Sixth graders who fail math have only a one-in-five chance of making it to the 12th grade on time and often repeat the ninth grade. Those failing English have a one-in-eight chance.

Thirty-three percent of eighth grade students scoring in the lowest mathematics achievement quartile fail to graduate.

Grade retention

Sixty-four percent of students who repeated a grade in elementary school and 63 percent of those who were held back in middle school left school without a diploma.

Low attendance

In one study of the eighth graders in Philadelphia who attended school less than 80 percent of the time, 78 percent eventually dropped out.

Disengagement in the classroom, including behavioral problems

Sixth graders who receive a poor behavior mark have a one-in-four chance of making it to the 12th grade on time.

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) will partner with school districts and education associations across the state to provide a variety of professional development opportunities to administrators and teachers in how to use existing data, resources and supports to reduce the number of dropouts.

All *Superintendent's Dropout Challenge* schools will be invited to submit information to the MDE on their Dropout Challenge efforts and student progress in spring 2010. Buildings that demonstrate the most student progress will be part of a special recognition and awards program.

"This Dropout Challenge, coupled with our dedicated teacher's efforts statewide, will allow us to lead together and embrace the one true purpose of education, which is putting our children first," Flanagan said.

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REACH FOR THE TOP MOVING STUDENTS UP NOT OUT

SUPERINTENDENT'S DROPOUT CHALLENGE

MICHIGAN'S 2009-2010 CHALLENGE TO SCHOOLS

In every elementary, middle and high school, identify 10-15 students who are nearing or in a transition year with multiple dropout risk factors and provide research-based supports and interventions

POSSIBLE IMPACT 37,000–55,500 STUDENTS

- ★ Reduce Dropouts ★ Increase Grades and Test Scores ★ Meet AYP
- ★ Attract and Retain Students ★ Engage Parents and Community



TURNING THE TIDE

Research shows most students send distress signals years before they drop out of school. In fact, key early warning signs displayed by students nearing or entering transitional school years, such as 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th grades, have been proven to be strong dropout predictors.

Because schools and districts now can predict early-on which students are most likely to drop out, they also can intervene to prevent dropout.

Early Warning Signs

- **Poor grades in core subjects**
 - ◇ Sixth graders who fail math have a one-in-five chance of making it to the 12th grade on time and often repeat the 9th grade. Those failing English have a one-in-eight chance.
 - ◇ 33% of 8th grade students scoring in the lowest mathematics achievement quartile fail to graduate.
- **Grade retention**
 - ◇ 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.

- **Low attendance**

- ◇ In one study of the eighth graders in Philadelphia who attended school less than 80 % of the time, 78% eventually dropped out.

- **Disengagement in the classroom, including behavioral problems**

- ◇ Sixth graders who receive a poor behavior mark have a one-in-four chance of making it to the 12th grade on time.

IMPLEMENTING THE CHALLENGE

Step 1: Commit to the Superintendent's Challenge by registering online at www.mi.gov/dropoutchallenge.

Step 2: Review previous year's attendance, grades, disciplinary actions, credit accumulation, grade promotion, and test scores of students nearing or entering transition years.

Step 3: Identify 10-15 students with multiple early warning signs by September 30, 2009. A free dropout data calculation tool for schools is available [National High School Center](#).

Step 4: Provide identified students with research-based supports and interventions.

Step 5: Engage the community in identifying an adult advocate, mentor or transition coach for each student.

Step 6: Involve students and families in the discussion and solutions.

Step 7: Monitor student academic, social and emotional progress.

To support educators, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) will partner with school districts and education associations across the state to provide a variety of professional development opportunities to administrators and teachers on how to use existing data, resources and supports to reduce dropouts.

RECOGNIZING PROGRESS

To recognize the substantial effort by schools who commit and register for this challenge, school and district names will appear on a special Dropout Challenge web page within the Michigan Department of Education website at www.mi.gov/dropoutchallenge.

This web page also will include the latest research and resources on Early Warning and Dropout Prevention.

All dropout challenge schools will be invited to submit information to MDE on their efforts and student progress in spring 2010. Buildings demonstrating the most student progress will be part of a special recognition and awards program.

Establishing an Early Warning System is a highly recommended dropout prevention strategy that can be funded with Title II-D funds. Supplementing services to support students at-risk of dropping out of school can be funded through Title I-Part A.