

5 EASY-TO-MONITOR INDICATORS FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

In more than a decade of working with school districts to re-engage students who have left before graduation, and to prevent students who are still enrolled from dropping out, Graduation Alliance has developed a keen awareness for identifying individuals who are at-risk.

There is much talk of the ABCs — attendance, behavior, and credits — as metrics to be used as early warning indicators of disengagement. But student lives are volatile. And some students who end up leaving school before graduation face life challenges that are completely unpredictable and often quite sudden — like a sickness, injury, mental illness, death of a parent or loss of family income. Identifying specific markers that serve as warning flags — before symptoms like chronic absenteeism, discipline infractions, and failed courses — is key to timely intervention.

Here are five easy-to-monitor indicators that can help school leaders identify students who may have become at-risk of leaving school so you can keep them on the road to earning a diploma.



01

FIRST DAY NO SHOW

The first day of classes after a break can be a barometer for how a student feels about school and how they've prioritized education against other life factors. Students who miss the first day may be dealing with social anxiety, bullying, child care, transportation insecurity, and other challenges that are predictive of pre-graduation exits.



02



TEST AVOIDANCE

Significant absences are a strong early warning indicator. An even better indicator, though, could be when a student misses school. Absences on test days could be indicative that a student is suffering from anxiety. And because tests generally carry more weight in a teacher's gradebook, missed test days can put students at a significant disadvantage for passing a class.

03

MOVING MAYHEM

Transience is often equated to housing and familial instability. But any instance a student has to move for any reason — whether it be to live with a different parent or to move into a bigger, nicer home — can be either a cause or an indicator of instability that can affect academic progress.



04



EXTRA-CURRICULAR DIS-ENGAGEMENT

The role of extracurricular participation in student retention is well-known, yet few schools track student activities outside of the classroom as a metric for monitoring holistic engagement. Students who have never been engaged in any extracurricular activities may need closer monitoring, and those who cut back on or cease participation in sports, clubs and arts programs may be acutely at-risk of disengaging academically, as well.

05

THE D QUESTION

Not all poor-but-passing grades are alike. A "D" grade earned by a student who has attended all of her classes and submitted all of her work while struggling in a rigorous course may not offer the same information, nor require the same interventions, as a "D" grade earned by a student who failed to attend class or submit assignments, even if the work that student did submit demonstrates comprehension of learning objectives warranting a poor-but-passing grade. Students who earn one or more "Disengaged D" grades may be acutely at risk of dropping out.



AND THERE'S MORE

In much the same way that we can identify students who have become at-risk before their plight became acute, we can also identify students who are most likely to struggle long before they even begin to struggle. Indeed, careful attention to "leading indicators" derived from a research-validated assessment of a student's academic resiliency, social-emotional learning status and career readiness can, with high reliability and validity, predict up to three years in advance who is likely to drop out. Combining these leading indicators with warning flags and ABCs places data firmly in your district's favor as you strive to provide tools for every student to thrive.

