Credit-Recovery Programs

National High School Center

Research has shown that students who miss or fail academic courses are at greater risk of dropping out of school than their peers. To re-engage these students researchers recommend that schools provide extra academic support (Dynarski et al., 2008). For example, schools can provide extra study time and opportunities for credit recovery and accumulation (also known as credit retrieval). These programs may be delivered in remedial classes during the regular school day or as extended learning time (e.g., before or after-school, Saturday school, or summer programs). In these programs, students can work closely with teachers either individually or in small groups to complete coursework or credits required to graduate. In other words, credit-recovery programs need to address the challenges that prevented students from previous success. This may include flexible pacing and schedules of instruction, adapting instructional methods and content to students' level of skills and learning styles, extra practice, and frequent assessments to inform instruction and to provide feedback to students. Data reported by schools suggests that credit-recovery programs may have positive effects on earning credits toward graduation, attendance rates, and passing rates on state standardized tests (e.g., Trautman & Lawrence, 2004).

Recognizing that credit recovery can be an important strategy for dropout prevention, several comprehensive dropout prevention models include this component. For example, the Talent Development High School model offers after-hours credit-recovery programs such as Twilight School and other summer and weekend activities for making up or catching up on work. This model has shown positive effects on students' average number of course credits (Kemple, Herlihy, & Smith, 2005). Additionally, an increasing number of schools use online learning options for credit recovery (Watson & Gemin, 2008). The use of technology as an alternative to traditional classroom instruction individualizes instruction and allows for scheduling flexibility. However, it also requires strategizing in order to maintain students' motivation and engagement and to help them develop independent learning skills, self-discipline, and technology-based communication skills necessary to become successful online learners. There is some initial research evidence supporting the effectiveness of utilizing technology to help students complete courses required for graduation (e.g., Cavanaugh et al., 2004; Hannafin, 2002).

Action Principles

For State

1. Set clear standards to govern credit-recovery programs.

2. Ensure programs meet minimum credit standards and are implemented with fidelity.

3. Determine the maximum number of credit recovery courses that a student can take.

4. Determine the instructional methodologies used for the credit recovery program(s) (e.g., online program, direct instruction, computer assisted instruction, etc.).

5. Certify national and state instructional programs (e.g., virtual learning courses) that can be used by districts and schools for credit recovery.

For District

1. Offer credit-recovery programs (e.g., an intensive semester of instruction in reading and mathematics, online credit-recovery programs).

2. Recommend that teachers certified in the appropriate subject oversee students trying to make up credits.

3. Establish an application process that requires parental consent for participation in a credit-recovery program.

4. Establish minimum criteria to determine eligibility for participation in the credit-recovery program.

5. Use a longitudinal data system to identify students at-risk for dropping out of school who may benefit from credit-recovery programs.

6. Use longitudinal data systems to track the outcomes of students participating in credit-recovery programs to inform decisions about retaining, re-designing, or replacing current credit-recovery programs.

7. Provide professional development and resources for teachers and others who are involved with the credit-recovery program.

For School

1. Offer mandatory support classes or after-school courses for credit-recovery for students at high risk (e.g., below 2.0 grade point average).

2. Monitor the credit-recovery program with appropriate data supports to make sure students have mastered the material before being awarded credit.

3. Convene a panel of principals and teachers to peer review each credit-recovery course to ensure it aligns with state and local standards.

4. Approve participation of a student in a credit-recovery program after review by the school leadership team, school improvement team, grade level team, or other school committee including the guidance counselor responsible for the student and a teacher in the appropriate subject area.

5. Continue to review data to help inform instructional decisions that will, over time, reduce the number of students needing credit-recovery options.

References and Resources

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