

ACROSS THE STAGE

**Doing What it
Takes to Help
Every Student
Graduate from
High School**



A PRACTICAL, STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR COACHING STUDENTS TO GRADUATE

A photograph of two young people in a classroom. On the left, a young man with short dark hair is smiling and looking towards the right. On the right, a young woman with short, curly dark hair is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is wearing a red t-shirt and a black strap over her shoulder. The background is a blurred classroom with blue lockers and colorful decorations.

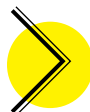
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FOREWORD



A Union of Professionals



Education is more critical than ever in today's high-tech, internationally competitive world. Fifty years ago, it may have been feasible to support a family with a job that did not even require a diploma. But today it is nearly impossible to find a fulfilling, self-sustaining career without at least a high school diploma and post-secondary education. Yet America's high school graduation rate continues to flounder. Once number one in the world, the United States now ranks at number 19 in high school completion. Our country loses 1.2 million students annually to high school dropout, an average of one every 26 seconds.

The individual costs to the high school dropout are staggering. A high school dropout earns an average of \$1 million less than a college graduate over the course of a lifetime. Yet the social costs are even more sobering. High school dropouts cost society approximately \$8 billion annually in welfare, social services, criminal justice, and lost tax revenue.

How are we losing so much potential? There are certainly a myriad of reasons. While the No Child Left Behind Act has helped shine a spotlight on the dropout problem, it has also added pressure to increase rigor and improve test results. This emphasis has made it more difficult for teachers to provide individualized attention and foster strong relationships, especially with struggling students. While this does not always create a problem for ambitious students with strong support systems, it may further alienate and disengage others, especially

those who need the additional motivation that stems from a trusting and supportive relationship and a real-world connection to their education.

This is where graduation coaches come in. Not every student needs the same level of support and encouragement from school staff, but for those who do need extra support, graduation coaches put those students back at the forefront of their education. Graduation coaches (and other support staff who work with at-risk students) are caring adults who develop strong bonds and help students strengthen their relationships throughout the school. Graduation coaches help students discover their potential and see the relevance in their education which in turn improves their motivation in the classroom. Ultimately, graduation coaches connect with students, empowering them to fulfill their promise and change their lives.

If you are reading this guide, I applaud you. I tip my cap to you for recognizing that ALL students deserve the opportunity to stay connected to their education and fulfill the promise of their lives. Good luck as you implement the strategies and programs outlined in this guide. You WILL be changing lives!

Thomas Roman, M.Ed., J.D.,
Dropout Prevention Specialist

INTRODUCTION



This guide describes the work of full-time Graduation Support Coordinators, or “graduation coaches.” However, it is intended for use by anyone, in any high school in America who is working to help struggling students graduate. The steps we describe can be taken by any high school staff member whose work encompasses any aspect of graduation support.

Not all students have ideal experiences during their high school years. All school systems have struggling students for whom graduation may seem unattainable. All schools have caring adults who can help those students. Even if there are no full-time graduation support people, we hope that this guide will help anyone who provides an extra bit of support to help struggling students become high school graduates.

A large body of research supports the work that graduation coaches do. This guide is not intended to duplicate the volumes of comprehensive research and the many excellent publications that address issues such as the nation’s dropout crisis, youth disengagement, and school improvement. Instead, this is a simple and practical guide, with steps that have proven to really work, with real kids, in real high schools. We have intentionally made the narratives short and list-like, to be easily read and digested by busy people.

Here, we share our experiences and our successes in getting the most highly at-risk students to walk across the stage at graduation and step into their own bright futures. With this guide we offer our menu of tried-and-true tips, little things that make a big difference, and the nitty-gritty.

What we have compiled here is what really works. Our district’s graduation rate has risen steadily since we began working in the schools. In 2007, the year before the inception of the graduation coaching program, our graduation rate was 64%. It is now 73% and climbing! Certainly, our district’s collective efforts are bringing about this positive change. We are proud to be a part of it.

Our district’s goal is 90% on-time graduation by the year 2020. Our graduation coach program data supports our strong belief that graduation coaches will play a critical role in reaching that goal.



“There are kids who walk across that stage every year with big grins on their faces and the graduation coach’s handprints on their backs.”

– HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR

One of the most important things we emphasize is that any graduation support effort or program is most effective when implemented by a team of trained individuals, engrained into the fabric of the school, and supported by the school administration.

We invite you to watch a short video about our graduation coaching program: www.aceaft.com/APEAGradCoach.mov or search for “ASD Grad Coach” on YouTube. In this video, you will see and hear stories of struggling students who found success, and how graduation coaches and other caring adults helped them to find it.

Please feel free to take this guide and use it, personalize it, or adapt it to meet your needs. No matter how you “coach” your students to graduate, we hope this guide is helpful. We are glad that you are out there too, working to build up young people—which we all know is easier than repairing adults.

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT GRADUATION SUPPORT COORDINATORS, A.K.A. “GRADUATION COACHES:”

Tamika Dowdy
Avis Fukuoka
Patricia Hanley

Jeanette LeClair
Christal Smaw
Carly Tibbetts

EDITORS:

- Stephen C. Brown and Corinne W. McVee Co-Directors, AFT Innovation Fund Graduation Coach Project, 2010-2012

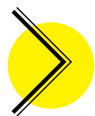
PROJECT CONSULTANT:

- Thomas Roman, M.Ed., J.D., Dropout Prevention Specialist

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- Shelley Berry

ABOUT THIS GUIDE



This guide is intended to be as user-friendly as possible for busy professionals seeking to implement their own graduation support program or simply improve existing services. First, you will see an overview of the purpose and goals of the graduation support coordinator (or “graduation coach”). Second, you will see the graduation coach job description and primary roles. Third, you will see those roles described in further detail, laid out chronologically, walking you through a full year from start to finish. And finally, you will have the opportunity to read some actual “tried and true” programs that have helped fulfill the mission of the graduation coaches in Anchorage. At the end of the guide, you will also find a variety of documents and correspondence that you may find useful as you look to attack the dropout problem and/or implement your own program.

OVERVIEW OF THE GRADUATION SUPPORT COORDINATOR (“COACH”)

The goal of the graduation coach is to empower students to transition successfully into high school, help them succeed academically, and graduate with a plan for their future. The role of the graduation coach is to identify students in need of support and work with them to find a pathway to graduation and success beyond. Graduation coaches examine data to identify students at risk of dropout, interact directly with students to assist with academic and social needs, develop and deliver intervention services, connect students and families to school and community services and resources, and help students develop goals for their future. Essentially, graduation coaches help knock down barriers that students are facing.

The graduation coach fills a niche in the high school. The huge caseload borne by counselors, administrators, and teachers limits the amount of time and effort that can be devoted to at-risk students. Graduation coaches are caring adults who pay close attention to students, build strong relationships with them, and offer or coordinate services and interventions. The work of graduation coaches centers on interventions that are being proven by a large and growing body of research (Jerald, 2007). Graduation coaches deliver highly personalized supports and services. They monitor and address each student’s risk factors that can be mitigated. They teach specific problem-solving strategies. They maintain parental communication and support parental decisions. They foster connections between students, schools, families, and the community. Through it all, they keep a laser-like focus on educational progress.

The primary duties of the graduation coach include (but are not limited to):

- » Identify students at risk of dropping out.
- » Assess, identify, and implement appropriate intervention strategies.
- » Facilitate coordinated communication among the building principal, teachers and other resource staff on dropout prevention/intervention methods and results.
- » Collaborate with school counselors and career resource advisors in assisting identified students in the development of individual learning plans and post-secondary plans.
- » Provide mentoring and support to specified at-risk students.
- » Identify and provide transition services to incoming students in need of support.
- » Provide outreach and support to students and families to increase parent and student engagement in education.
- » Coordinate with the business community to arrange mentorships and apprenticeships.
- » Compile data for tracking and evaluation purposes and maintain student records.
- » Identify students who have dropped out and encourage them to re-engage in school (dropout recovery).

**OVER THE SCHOOL YEAR:
STEP-BY-STEP GRADUATION
SUPPORT**

The following steps illustrate the key strategies and activities that can be carried out by graduation coaches or by other school staff members who are assigned to work with at-risk students. The steps are laid out in approximate chronological order, but of course may be rearranged to fit local needs. Many of the elements of graduation support described take place concurrently.

**STEP ONE: GET TO KNOW
THE SCHOOL**

Investigate school resources, both academic and non-academic. Become familiar with school data and characteristics of the student population. This information is helpful in identifying potential students for the graduation coach's caseload.

Indicators include:

- » Ethnicity
- » Poverty rate
- » Attendance rate
- » Graduation and dropout rates
- » School report card
- » Percentage of students on track for graduation
- » Performance on graduation tests or other graduation requirements

“You are the best kind of person, one who gives hope because you don’t judge – you help, you follow through, and you don’t give up.”

– PARENT, TO
GRADUATION COACH

CONNECTING AND RELATING WITHIN THE SCHOOL

It's about relationships! Graduation coaches work independently and as members of collaborative teams, often facilitating communication between school leadership, teaching staff, and support staff on dropout prevention strategies and interventions. Coaches meet with school administrators early on to assess the school's greatest needs (e.g. credit recovery, attendance, transition support for incoming students, graduation test support). It is also important to establish a set of goals that fit in with the dynamics of the school and the school improvement plan.

Everyone in the school interacts with students and therefore has an impact on them. Build relationships with the entire school staff. Most especially, get to know:

- » Counselors
- » Teachers
- » Academic department heads
- » Registrars
- » Secretaries/administrative assistants
- » Security personnel
- » Special programs (e.g. Homeless, English Language Learner, Title VII Indian Education, Migrant Education)
- » Special Education department coordinator
- » Teaching assistants and other support staff


It is critical to get to know the counseling staff. Graduation coaches complement—but do not supplant—the work of high school counselors. Graduation coaches provide additional support to the most highly at-risk students. Establish guidelines for the role of the graduation coach within or in conjunction with the counseling department.

Relationships with teachers are important too. Graduation coaches work with teachers, primarily within the context of working with students to improve their academic progress, but also to seek student referrals and support to provide additional services such as tutoring and credit recovery.

It takes teamwork! Join the school leadership team, school improvement plan committee, and similar groups. Phrases like “How can we better serve our at-risk students? What do we need to improve graduation rates? How can I help?” will go a long way.

A school may choose to form a graduation support team or include the graduation coach in an existing team. Existing teams (e.g. School Leadership, Student Support) also may be structured to include graduation support. Graduation coaches should know the school's improvement plan and integrate it into their own action plan.

Clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and procedures are essential to an effective graduation support program. Graduation coaches must seek administrative support to establish their roles, complement existing services, and fill gaps in those services. In order to be most effective, graduation coaches need to know the level of authority they have and must have access to transcripts and any other relevant records. The workflow should be designed so that graduation coaches receive appropriate information at appropriate times. For example, when counselors conduct credit checks, students who have severe credit deficits or who are overage might be automatically referred to graduation coaches.

A photograph of a classroom setting. In the foreground, a woman with dark hair, wearing a black top with a red and white geometric pattern and a pearl necklace, is seated at a wooden table. She is holding a white marker and writing on a piece of paper. To her left, a young woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey hoodie and a dark scarf, is also seated at the table, looking down at the paper. In the background, another student is seated at a desk, facing away from the camera, wearing a black puffer jacket and a brown beanie. The background features wooden cabinets with various papers and posters pinned to them, including one that says "GOAL" and another that says "DISCIPLINE".

It is essential to determine who in the school is responsible for each element of graduation support. Administrative support and direction is critical to program success.

Build awareness and support for the program by frequently informing colleagues and administrators of programs developed, progress being made, and what is being done every day for kids. Build credibility by sharing data: “I have 50 kids in credit recovery,” or “I took 10 kids to the local job center and all of them are now earning credit while working.” Let people know the scope of work being done. “Of 20 letters sent home, nine students opted to return to school next semester,” or “Fifty students attended the Education Options Fair last week.”

Compile and report student data reports by quarter, semester, and year. Graduation coaches’ data can prove that the graduation coaching program is helping the school to meet its overall goals and is achieving things on the principal’s “to do list.” Have a thorough understanding of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), a language that principals understand well. This will lend further support and credibility to graduation support efforts.

STEP TWO: ESTABLISH A SPACE AND A PRESENCE IN THE SCHOOL

Location, location, location! Ideally, the graduation coach’s office will be placed for maximum visibility and accessibility. The ability to close the door is important, though, because students often come in with sensitive personal issues. To reflect a true collaboration, the graduation coach may also be located in or near the counselors’ offices.

Make the graduation coach’s office into a friendly and welcoming place. Have a large wall chart showing a pictorial representation of graduation requirements. Create a bulletin board with names and pictures of “super star” students. Have snacks on hand. Display brochures for school and community programs and resources. If possible, have a computer for students to use.

Be visible at school functions and programs. Actively participate in freshman orientation and informational meetings for alternative schools and community programs. Have a presence on the school’s social media sites and website. Help with existing tutoring programs. Be available to students by location and by action.

Graduation support professionals need to explain their role and job functions—constantly! As someone in a new role, coaches must help define it and must become self-advocates. People sometimes confuse graduation coaches with counselors. The graduation coach is sometimes mistaken for the person who orders the caps and gowns! Graduation coaches will need to help educate the school and community about the scope and importance of the graduation support services provided.

“People sometimes think I’m the one who orders the caps and gowns.”

– GRADUATION COACH



STEP THREE: IDENTIFY AT-RISK STUDENTS

Know the risk factors. Examine the data to find out who is at risk.

IDENTIFY STUDENTS BEFORE SCHOOL BEGINS

A graduation coach's work year begins before school starts. Use available school data to identify students with risk indicators. Pull credit reports and transcripts as early in the fall as possible. Look for credit deficiencies. This includes reviewing the records of incoming ninth graders.

Work with the school administration and counselors to establish criteria and a priority system for establishing a caseload. Top considerations are:

- » Students with credit deficiencies. Look for students in each grade level who are behind in credits according to graduation requirements.
- » Students who are "aging out" or overage for their grade. Know the maximum age that the district is legally obligated to educate students. This age may be different for special education students.
- » These **key risk indicators** are evidence of disengagement and predictors of dropout:
 - Absent more than 10% of days enrolled
 - Grade point average below 2.0
 - Four or more days of in-school or out-of-school suspension
 - Failure of one or more core subjects

Send letters home to parents of all caseload students. Introduce the graduation coach and the services available.

USE THE REGISTRATION PROCESS TO IDENTIFY STUDENTS

Graduation coaches' involvement in school registration is crucial. Design the school registration process to allow the graduation coach to "flag" students with credit deficiencies. Flagged students and their parent(s) must then see the graduation coach before they proceed with the registration process. Meet incoming students during the registration process before they enroll in school to explore credit recovery or alternative options. Let them know that they are welcome at the high

school, but may require intensive credit recovery. Explain that alternative placement may have the flexibility and options that will help the student get back on track more quickly.

DO NOT NEGLECT FRESHMEN!

Many high schools may have established transition programs or ninth grade academies, but if not, this may be one target population for graduation coaches. Research shows that transitions are a critical time for all students; those at-risk are even more vulnerable to truancy and disengagement. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University found that up to 40% of ninth grade students in cities with the highest dropout rates repeat the ninth grade, but only 10–15% of those repeaters go on to graduate (Balfanz & Letgers, 2004).

Reach out to middle school/junior high counselors to identify incoming ninth graders who have risk factors and are in need of support. Introduce the graduation coach and the counselors to ninth graders early in the school year. This will help prevent feelings of anonymity and alienation that can develop during the transition to high school.

Develop an early warning system for ninth graders.

Heed the early warning signs! Low attendance during the first 30 days of the ninth grade year is a stronger indicator that a student will drop out than any other eighth grade predictor, including test scores, other academic achievement, and age (Jerald, 2006). Failing Algebra I also predicts dropout (Orihuela, 2006). Be prepared to work with this vulnerable population if there is not an effective transition program in place.

ESTABLISH A CASELOAD

“There needs to be two of me!” – Graduation Coach

A full-time graduation coach can effectively serve a caseload of 50-75 students. Accept that the caseload is fluid, especially with transient student populations.

Establishing the caseload is a triage process. Make a roster of students with risk factors and then divide students by issue. This will help determine which services and interventions are most needed.

Ultimately, “on the caseload” means that the graduation coach has met with the student, contacted the parent(s), and developed a graduation plan for the student that includes regular and consistent follow-up. Look at the caseload list by level of severity.

RED	YELLOW	GREEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Severe credit deficiencies. » Failed the state graduation exam. » May benefit from alternate placement. » Active caseload. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Entering senior year “on the bubble.” » Must pass every core subject and every elective course to graduate on time. » Must pass state graduation exam. » Active caseload. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Watch list. » Some risk factors; monitor progress. » Students are in addition to active caseload.

The triage process may transition some students from the graduation coach's caseload to alternative schools or programs. The goal is to keep students in the school—but, realistically, some students are best served by alternative placement.

"I worked with a boy who was a high risk student from the start. He was constantly in trouble and maybe had passed one or two of his classes in his freshman year. But by the end of his junior year, we all started to see progress and motivation to graduate. He came into his senior year with 12 credits of the 22.5 credits needed to graduate. He transferred to an alternative program to make up credits. One of the "carrots" to get him to do this was that if he earned enough credits while in the alternative program, he could come back to school and graduate with his friends. He currently has 16.5 credits—he completed 4 credits in half a semester! Now he can come back to school and graduate with his class."

– Graduation Coach

The graduation coach also serves students who are not on the official

caseload. There may be students who receive one-time interventions with little or no formal follow-up (e.g. referrals to outside programs or agencies), or who access interventions developed by the graduation coach (e.g. tutoring, career fairs).

The goal for every student on the caseload is always on-time graduation, but it is well worth it to work with students to graduate late rather than to get a GED. Late graduates have greater success than those who opt for a GED in lieu of a high school diploma. "The extra work that late graduates and their high schools put into earning a diploma pays off—not only in late graduates' academic outcomes, but in jobs, involvement in civic life, and commitment to healthy lifestyles" (Center for Public Education, 2009).

ADDING STUDENTS TO THE CASELOAD

Have the school's registrar notify the graduation coach when new students arrive with credit deficiencies. Seek and receive referrals from school personnel throughout the year.

Students may land on the caseload for non-school issues. Graduation coaches will encounter students experiencing pregnancy, homelessness, abuse, or substance abuse. Students may be in high-risk peer groups such as gangs



or children of incarcerated parents. Family risk factors include poverty, transiency, low expectations, and a family history of not graduating.

Ensure that graduation coaches are included in any withdrawal process. Students should not be allowed to withdraw without a final effort from the graduation coach.

STEP FOUR: GET TO KNOW THE COMMUNITY, ITS CHALLENGES, AND RESOURCES

Graduation coaches need to be highly knowledgeable about the community and the factors that most directly affect students. The list can be long: poverty, transience, housing and homelessness, substance abuse, crime, juvenile justice, pregnant and parenting teens, neighborhood issues, gangs, and more.

Also be aware of state or regional trends, characteristics, and issues. Investigate the transiency of the student population and its effect on the schools. Know the truancy laws and the legal age for dropout. State or district policies for transfer of credits can greatly affect the transcripts and credit accumulation of transient students.

Know the options and resources available in the community, both academic and non-academic. The graduation coach will need to help students and families with social needs. Maintain a good working relationship with key community programs that offer assistance, such as food banks, counseling centers, job training and placement centers, drug and alcohol treatment programs, and organizations that assist pregnant and parenting teens.

The community may have high school completion programs that operate outside of the district. In some cases, enrolling a student in a community high school completion program may be the best option for them and can remove the student from the dropout list.

While most people at the school know something about available programs for at-risk students, the graduation coach knows every detail!

STEP FIVE: PLAN AND OFFER SERVICES

“Once you decide what a student needs to be successful, you must advocate and act to ensure their needs are met.”

– Graduation Coach

Once graduation coaches have assessed the needs of the school and students, they must identify appropriate interventions. Some services may already be in place and coaches must ensure that their students access them. Other programs may need to be developed. Graduation coach services address a broad range of recipients. Some interventions are carried out on an individual student basis. Some are designed to address specific risk factors. Others are designed to serve all students on the caseload. Still others may be accessible to the whole school.

The spectrum of services is broad and deep. Graduation coaches must strike a balance between providing direct services and coordinating programs. They must merge social development with academic support—and the lines often are blurred. The graduation coach’s smaller caseload allows them to explore beyond the presenting problem and address root causes. At times, graduation coaches find themselves accompanying students to events such as medical treatments or court appearances. It is important to ensure that students’ needs are being met. Survival trumps learning. If children are in danger, in pain, or hungry, their focus will not be on school.

**SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**

**ACADEMIC
SUPPORT**

Identifying and implementing services can be the most difficult but also the most important step in serving students who are at risk of dropping out. Difficulties may arise from lack of funding for programs and ideas. School or community programs may be full and not accepting new applicants. Students may face a myriad of logistical roadblocks. For example, a school might provide an after school online credit recovery class but students may not be able to participate due to job schedules, lack of computer access, transportation issues, or family responsibilities. The graduation coach is the problem-solver who finds ways to make things work.

It is October. Mark is a senior with 13.5 credits. He needs 22.5 to graduate. He wants to graduate in May. The graduation coach makes a plan with Mark and then contacts his parents, counselor, and teachers to let them know the plan. Mark takes three core classes at school and three classes at a vocational program, all during the day. He also takes an after school class and two online elective classes. As soon as he completes his first online class—any day now—he will start the next one. The graduation coach directly monitors Mark’s classroom and online grades. She does this bi-weekly, at least. She keeps in touch with Mark’s mom and his teachers. Every Friday, the graduation coach checks in with Mark to make sure he’s handling such a heavy work load. So far, so good! Mark will begin the second semester with 18.5 credits. He will take six classes during the day, along with after school and online courses, to bring him to 22.5 credits in May. With the help and encouragement of his graduation coach, Mark will walk across the stage.

STEP SIX: ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN PARENTAL CONTACT

“I can’t thank you enough for your care, consideration, thoughtfulness, and dedication. Without your perseverance, we would have been lost and forgotten.”

We encountered a miracle when we met you because now we can realistically look forward to our son’s graduation and his post-secondary education.”

— Parent, to Graduation Coach

Send an introductory letter to the parents of students on the caseload. Send a follow-up letter that shares the graduation plan created between the student and the graduation coach. Include a written explanation of graduation requirements.

An introductory telephone call to parents is an effective way to introduce the graduation coach and to explain their role in the school. Explain how the graduation coach works in conjunction with school counselors, provides additional support for the student, and will be monitoring attendance and grades. Personally invite parents to open houses and parent nights. Greet them in person when they come.

Lay out the options available to the student. Will he scramble to graduate on time, or would it be better to become a fifth-year senior? Would she consider a transfer to an alternative program? Let the parents know that their decisions will be supported.

Listen to students and parents. Empathize and validate frustrations, then collaborate to create solutions. Students do not necessarily share everything with their parents. Seek the parents’ view—which may be different from the student’s view. Parental involvement in the graduation plan can be a pivotal step in the turnaround process.

STEP SEVEN: AS THE SCHOOL YEAR ENDS

Recruit students who need credit recovery or could benefit from other summer programs.

Prepare for fall registration in the spring! Before the work year

ends, compile credit deficiency reports as soon as final grades are available. Ensure that credit-deficient students will be flagged at fall registration so they must see the graduation coach before they can register for classes.

Ensure that students complete online or other coursework that is outside of the regular school day or that happens outside of the school campus.

Work with the students who will be fifth year seniors in the fall. Give them a course schedule of exactly what courses they are (or will be) registered for in order to complete graduation requirements.

Help identify and recruit students for extended year credit recovery programs. If feasible, the graduation coach should sign up to work in these programs.

Make and categorize a list of upcoming graduates. Determine who will be summer graduates and December graduates, and who is projected to graduate in the following spring or summer.

Celebrate everybody who graduates!

REFLECT ON THE YEAR

The end of the school year is a time to look back on program successes as well as those areas that need improvement. What worked? What didn't work? What needs to be adjusted? What programs might be added for next year? Start creating plans for next year. Get feedback from administrators, counselors, teachers and other partners.



Consider personal accomplishments and goals for next year. Are there things that could be done better next year—be more organized, start a new program, work on your listening skills, provide better parental outreach? Set some personal goals and seek out mentoring and professional development opportunities.

ONGOING COORDINATION OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Graduation coaches must constantly balance providing direct services with coordination of programs that range from academic support to social and developmental needs, outreach to families and community resources, and advocacy within the school.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS

Building relationships with students is essential to success.

At-risk students usually have not had successful experiences in school. Often, they are hesitant to work with staff and lack positive relationships with the adults they encounter at the school. Thus, at the core of all of the graduation coach's efforts is a trusting and respectful relationship. The graduation coach may have greater influence on a student than any other adult in the school.

Relationships are built primarily through listening. Trust is established through consistent follow through. The graduation coach listens, and finds out what the students need to be successful. Then, the goal is to develop a plan that ensures those needs are met. The graduation coach must follow up and adjust this plan with the student regularly. This could be as simple as being someone the student can talk to, or as complicated as helping underage students with public assistance or medical services. Whatever it is, students will appreciate having a caring adult advocate—something they often feel that they have never had.

DIRECT INTERACTION WITH STUDENTS

Learn about the students by meeting with each one individually. Ask about interests, hobbies, and future goals. Talk about post-secondary preparedness and options. Establish a rapport that allows for open communication.

Ask each student: “What do you see yourself doing after high school? How do you plan to get there? What can I do to help you get there?”

Evaluate the student's current academic standing and risk factors. Keep an eye on such factors as English language learners or special education; these do not necessarily put a student at risk, but can affect academic success.

Family situations can reveal clues about motivation to graduate. Try to determine how much the family values education and the family history of graduates and dropouts. Explore whether the student will be the first member of the family to earn a high school diploma or attend college. How does this affect the expectations for the student?

Develop and use forms to help assess and document student's situation and progress toward goals. The Forms Library at the end of this guide contains examples. Use career assessments to explore and cultivate student interest in occupations and post-secondary education. Share results with teachers and parents. Tie these aspirations to coursework and academic success.

Develop an individual graduation plan for each student.

Develop an individual graduation plan for each student who is on the caseload. Work with the student to make a plan for exactly how to graduate on time. Put it in writing and let the student

Each one-unit increase in the number of protective factors can significantly decrease the likelihood of engaging in risk behaviors and increase the likelihood of positive school outcomes from 14% to 40%.

– United Way of Anchorage,
October 2012

sign it with you. Facilitate coordinated communication among the building principal, teachers, and other resource staff on graduation support methods and results. Good communication is essential! Make sure that the students' graduation plans are not contradictory to the counselors' plans or efforts. Graduation coaches may be asked to assist school counselors in the development of individual learning plans and post-secondary plans.

Be prepared to help students access multiple ways to earn high school credit. These can include:

- » Work experience
- » Credit by choice (credit earned for a planned learning experience)
- » In-school or online credit recovery
- » After school classes at career centers or tech prep programs
- » Mentorship programs
- » "Zero hour" (early morning) classes or office aide experience
- » Summer school
- » Extended school year for credit recovery
- » Online courses
- » Credits offered by district programs for students who qualify (e.g. English language learner, homeless, Native American, migrant)

Agree to follow up regularly with the student to review the plan and monitor progress together. Meet weekly or biweekly as needed. A plan without

follow-up is merely a piece of paper, or worse yet, a broken promise. Stay visible and accessible. Keep the door open to students. Encourage them to come in for academic assistance or for help with getting a job, applying for food stamps, or finding transportation.

BUILD ASSETS AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS; REDUCE RISK FACTORS

Protective factors are things that happen in and outside of school that positively affect youth. Similarly, **risk factors** are things that negatively affect youth. Every student comes to school with a combination of factors; anyone who works with at-risk students knows that struggling students are likely to have engaged in one or more risky behaviors. Part of the role of the graduation coach is to help students and families build protective factors and reduce risk factors. The Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets (search-institute.org) is a research-based approach to positive youth development. Developmental Assets are positive experiences and qualities that help young people become successful adults. Graduation coaches can use this asset-building framework to help students gain personal qualities that they need to succeed and to thrive.

TRANSITION SUPPORT

Graduation coaches play a key role in facilitating smooth transitions for incoming freshmen and for students who are new

to the school throughout the year. Reach out to middle schools to establish a vertical team approach. Meet with eighth grade counselors to determine which students need assistance. Work closely with ninth grade counselors to ensure proper course placement and avoid self-selection pitfalls.

Check the records of all incoming students, all year long. Look for risk factors. Arrange to meet students who may need support. New students are evaluating the culture of their new school. “Does anyone notice me? Do people care about me?”

During the first weeks of the transition it is important to informally check on these students (e.g. saying hi in the hall, quick chats at lunch) to observe how they are transitioning. Graduation coaches may even establish a Caring Adult in the Building program or a peer mentoring program pairing freshman with upperclassmen to help ease transitions. Eliminate anonymity and establish a caring culture of high expectations.

Maintain constant vigilance over the list of students who are new to the school. Identify and provide transition services to incoming students in need of support. It is important to know which students coming into the school have experienced previous challenges. This is true for incoming freshmen, enrolled students returning after extended absences, and returning dropouts. If behavior or attendance problems are immediately obvious, take immediate action. Home visits, phone calls to parents, and formal meetings with students go a long way in letting everybody know, right from the start, that someone has an eye on the situation and is working to ensure that the student experiences success at school.

ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH

Every day, graduation coaches provide outreach and support to students and families to increase parent and student engagement in education. This may mean that, at times, the workplace extends beyond the school walls. Whether making home visits to

students and families or visiting community programs for at-risk teens, graduation coaches find themselves out in the community. Community agencies appreciate knowing who the graduation coach is and that someone from the school is keeping current on the details of the programs or services offered.

INVESTIGATE “POISON POLICIES”

Are students subject to out-of-school suspensions for being absent too many times? Does a certain number of tardies count as an absence? Are there “automatic failure” policies for which a certain number of absences results in no credit? Are too many doors being closed because of policies that work against at-risk students? Graduation coaches may need to challenge some of these policies.

CREATE INCENTIVE PROGRAMS TO RECOGNIZE PROGRESS

Acknowledge small successes every step of the way.

Graduation coaches may create “mini” policies or reward systems for their own students. For example, it is unlikely that students on the graduation coach’s caseload would ever win “Perfect Attendance” awards. However, coaches may establish “Most Improved” awards for their students to acknowledge their progress. Design recognitions to complement school programs and policies.

CONNECT STUDENTS AND FAMILIES WITH EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN THE COMMUNITY

Field trips to local job placement centers, vocational programs, colleges and universities are a good way to help students envision their future. Initiate, organize, or help chaperone visits to places and programs that may inspire or motivate students to complete high school and go on to post-secondary education. The community also may have career exploration, job shadowing, and mentorship opportunities. Federally funded TRIO programs

for underprivileged youth, such as Talent Search and Upward Bound, may be available.

ALTERNATE PLACEMENT

Consider alternative school placement for students with severe credit deficiencies, or for whom the traditional high school simply is not a good fit. Is the student willing to move to a different school? Some families have had several generations graduate from the school and cannot imagine their child receiving a diploma from a different school. It may take some effort to convince students and parents that alternative placements are in their best interests and are “ok.”

LOCATING MISSING STUDENTS

Has a student gone missing? The obvious first steps are to contact parents, teachers, and school counselors. If the student is still missing in action, there are other ways.

- » Find out where the student works. Keep contact information for employers. Pay a visit to the student’s work location. Talk to their boss.
- » Call students directly. Get their cell phone numbers. Get their friends’ cell phone numbers, too. Ask siblings and friends to help locate absent students.
- » Make a house call.
- » Use the district’s social media as appropriate, or ask the student’s friends to check social media for clues to whereabouts.
- » Beat the bushes. Check local teen hangouts, malls, and other known “skipping” sites.

COLLABORATE WITH TEACHERS

Contact teachers as needed for specific academic issues. Graduation coaches help students build better relationships with their teachers. Sometimes, students need help realizing how their actions—or inactions—affect their success in the classroom.

A little flexibility can go a long way:

It is November. Sasha is senior with 15.5 credits; she needs 22.5 credits to graduate. She is carrying a load of six regular classes and one online class. She works 30 hours per week and receives credit for work experience. Sasha is passing five of her classes but is failing English and has fallen behind in her online class. She has little time for homework after school. Her P.E. teacher is allowing her to miss one class per week in order to receive help from the graduation coach to complete the online class. Sasha’s graduation coach helps her with English, two days a week during lunchtime. Sasha feels less stressed now and her grades are improving. She will be caught up for the spring semester and will graduate in May.

TRACK AND REPORT DATA

Data tells the story. It supports your efforts and your program.

Data is essential for tracking student progress and evaluating program effectiveness. Use data to tell the story of how graduation coach services are making a positive difference in academic progress, graduation rates, and dropout rates.

Data can reveal whether interventions are making a difference for individual students or for the school as a whole. Make decisions based on data. Data is essential for establishing and evaluating long-term and short-term measurable goals.

A graduation coach’s caseload is fluid, making data tracking a big challenge. Coordinate with building-level and district-level administration to track needed data and be accountable for that data.

Good recordkeeping is essential. Keep a file on each student. Develop a student contact log to track time with students. Track the number of students served, interventions provided, number



Data tells the story. It supports your efforts and your program.

of graduates, and number of students on track to graduate.

Graduation coaches have an identified caseload and also serve students peripherally. Concentrate data tracking on caseload students—those students for whom a written graduation plan is in place.

Compile reports each quarter, semester, and year. Include summer school and information from outside sources as applicable.

CODING OF DROPOUTS

Be careful and diligent about the coding of dropouts. Inaccurate coding can result in an artificially high dropout rate. Transferring to a community-based high school completion program may mean that the student is not considered a dropout. Students in outside programs may be required to pass high school graduation exams.

It may be found that the GED is the only real solution. GED students will likely be listed as dropouts. The GED is a last resort, but it is better than no diploma at all.

DROPOUT RECOVERY

Identify students who have dropped out and encourage them to re-engage in school.

“Re-engaging dropouts is a difficult task. It does not always bear fruit. Yet it is critical for a student’s future.”

– Graduation Coach

Critical steps to dropout identification and recovery:

- » Obtain a list of recently withdrawn students. In the fall, this will include unknown summer leavers.
- » Look for dropouts at data points during the year, i.e., end of quarter and semester, after winter and spring break.
- » Determine which students are actual dropouts and which may have transferred.
- » Determine which students are likely to be successful by returning to the school and which students would be more successful at an alternative setting. Do this in conjunction with the counselors and administrators.
- » Do everything possible to arrange a meeting with the student and family.

Set a return date that optimizes chances for success. Returning in the middle of a quarter or semester may mean that the student does not earn credit for work they complete. This can frustrate an already frustrated student. After the return date is set, use the interim time to keep in contact via phone calls, letters, and home visits. Each time, reiterate the plans for readmission, credit recovery, and eventual graduation.

Try to get the student to stay in school, perhaps as a fifth year senior. Locate local programs that can help. Encourage students to take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) or other career assessments to help determine areas of strength and career potential. Typically, these tests can be taken multiple times if needed.

“SIX-CREDIT SENIORS:” WHAT WORKS FOR STUDENTS WITH SEVERE CREDIT DEFICIENCIES

The key is to provide options and restore hope.

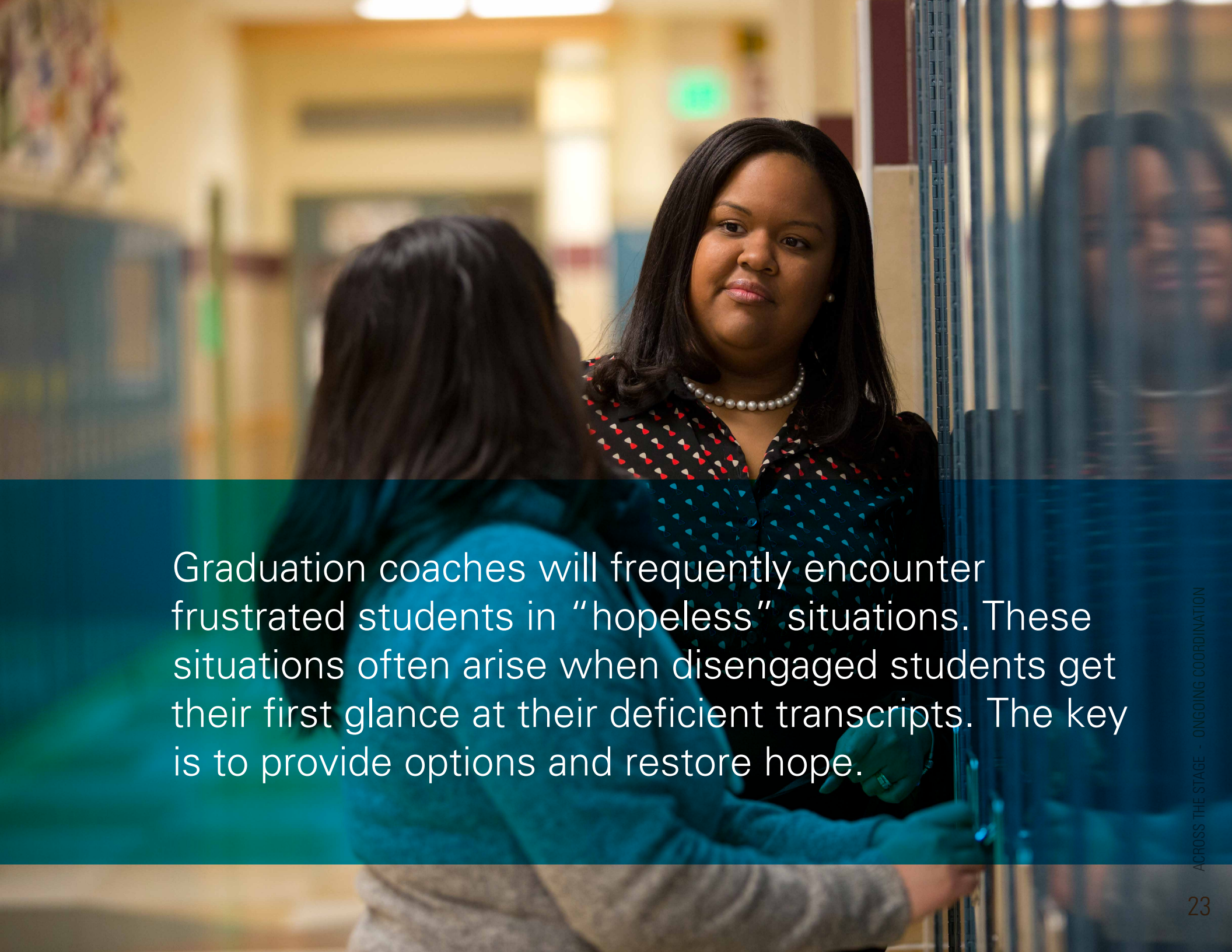
By November of Mandy’s junior year, her transcript shows only six credits. She is currently taking six classes and

passing them all. She does not attend other programs or have a job. The graduation coach invites a counselor from an alternative school to speak to a group of juniors who are behind in credits. Mandy wants to graduate from her own school, but she attends the meeting and decides to sign up to attend the alternative school next semester. The graduation coach has a follow up visit with Mandy to make a plan. They discuss classes she needs, the possibility of working in the summer to earn on-the-job elective credit, and what she’ll need to return to her school and graduate on time. Mandy’s parents are very pleased that their daughter has an option to make up a “lost year” and still graduate on time.

Graduation coaches will encounter frustrated students in “hopeless” situations quite frequently. These situations often arise when disengaged students get their first glance at their deficient transcripts. The key is to provide options and restore hope. By providing options to help a student see the “light at the end of the tunnel” through a combination of alternative school, twilight school, summer school, online credit recovery, regaining credits by completing missing assignments, etc. Graduation coaches can instill hope in a desperate student on the verge of dropout. A student’s recognition that they can still graduate on-time (or even a bit late) can provide the motivation to make a plan and follow through.

OTHER TIPS AND TRICKS

- » Collect extra caps, gowns, and graduation announcements. Graduates sometimes will donate theirs back to the school.
- » Have a supply of snacks, bus passes, and extra school supplies.
- » Offer to write recommendation letters for scholarships, jobs, and internship programs.
- » Help locate laptop computers for online coursework and for completing school assignments.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a black shirt with a red and white geometric pattern and a pearl necklace, stands in a school hallway. She is looking towards a student whose back is to the camera. The student is wearing a blue hoodie. The hallway has bookshelves and a green exit sign in the background.

Graduation coaches will frequently encounter frustrated students in “hopeless” situations. These situations often arise when disengaged students get their first glance at their deficient transcripts. The key is to provide options and restore hope.

- » Collect donated computers and lend them to students.
- » Get out of the office with students—meet them outside, in the cafeteria, out in “their space.”
- » Avoid being an authority figure; be a supportive, but honest mentor.

COMMON INTERVENTIONS AND PROMISING STRATEGIES

Upon first read, many future graduation coaches are overwhelmed by the multitude of tasks and interventions that are needed to help students graduate. The task is daunting, but with careful assessment of student needs and existing interventions, graduation coaches can prioritize and implement the most appropriate interventions without trying to “do it all.” The following interventions were developed by the graduation coaches in the Anchorage School District.

The most successful interventions are integrated into the school day.

While graduation coaches work to implement a wide variety of programs, it is critically important to intentionally develop interventions that are integrated into the school day. This strategy eliminates the need for after school logistics challenges such as transportation, which often is a barrier for at-risk students, and afterschool jobs. Working with administration and teachers to find ways to incorporate programs during advisory periods, study halls, elective courses, lunch periods, etc. will be very helpful and increase participation.

ACADEMIC INTERVENTIONS

CREDIT RECOVERY

Pull out all of the stops for students who have small credit deficiencies but who might not graduate without your help.

“Trey is a fifth year senior with 21 credits and only 1.5 to go! He works full time and is signed up for three half-credit online classes. I check his online grades weekly to monitor his progress. I also work with the online teacher who adjusts assignment deadlines. I’ve also recruited his former wrestling coach to help. He is providing tutoring to the student free of charge. Trey has finished one online class so far, 50% of the second one, and hasn’t yet started the third. I have high hopes that between the three of us, and Trey’s desire to finish, he will be a December graduate!”

– Trey’s Graduation Coach

One of the primary functions of a graduation coach is to help students access and succeed in credit recovery programs or options. Graduation coaches must work with counselors to understand the credit review process in order to flag students in need of credit recovery. A graduation coach will provide students with as many options for credit recovery as possible in hopes that at least one workable option will emerge.

The graduation coach may help negotiate an “internal credit recovery contract” with a teacher in which the student will complete missing assignments or re-take an exam to gain credit rather than repeat a full course. Graduation coaches also will need to walk students through the application processes for credit recovery programs. Students and parents may not be likely to investigate programs or program details on their own, or may not know how to or where to start.

The graduation coach is the school's credit recovery and credit accumulation guru.

Students and parents will need to know the starting and ending times and dates. Students may need help with transportation, tuition or other fees, and necessary equipment or supplies.

Students may qualify for other programs, either in-district or provided by an outside agency, to recover credits. One of the primary roles of the graduation coach is to identify such programs and encourage students and families to access them. Once students have enrolled in a credit recovery program, the graduation coach's job is not over. It is important to check in with the student to monitor their progress and provide help if necessary.

Stop by credit recovery programs to check on students. Do this regularly and frequently. A graduation coach may need to alter their regularly scheduled work hours in order to provide adequate support to their students during programs that have after school, evening, or weekend hours. Seeing a graduation coach at a weekend program can have a strong effect on student motivation!

CREDIT DEFICIENCY NOTIFICATION LETTERS

Each semester, graduation coaches send home "jeopardy letters" to the parents of students in each grade level who have failed one or more core classes. Parents are notified about the class failure, the necessity to make up the class, and suggested ways to make it up. Letters include the student's academic transcript and a copy of the graduation requirements.

"My son has a difficult time with school and graduation has been uncertain. She [graduation coach] has been guiding him as his graduation advisor. I cannot help but think that were it not for her care, concern, great advice and follow-through that he would not stand a chance of graduating. Due to her efforts, it looks like he's going to make it!"

– Parent

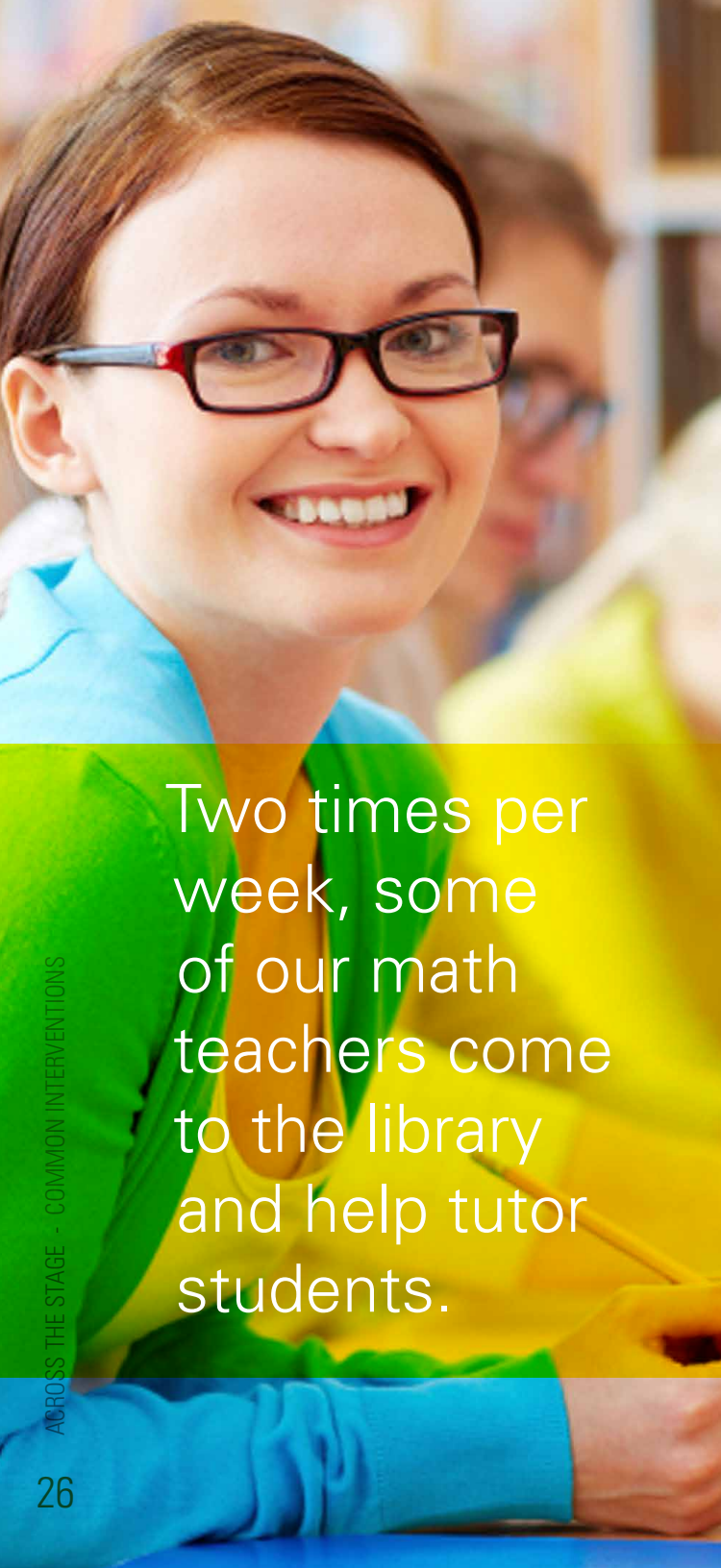
TUTORING

Graduation coaches can offer or facilitate tutoring. This can be on an individual basis or in scheduled group sessions. Graduation coaches may provide direct service or coordinate with academic department heads and teachers to provide tutoring or test preparation programs.

Tutoring can be offered before or after school and during lunch periods. Make appointments with students or establish a regularly scheduled tutoring time for students who need structure.

Partner with local colleges to offer tutoring, internships, and community service opportunities for college students to create a win-win situation. College students make great tutors, mentors and role models for high school students. High school students gain much more than just academic skills!

The need for tutoring tends to increase toward the end of the school year and around test time. Collaborate with teachers to increase opportunities.



Two times per week, some of our math teachers come to the library and help tutor students.

AFTER SCHOOL PEER TUTORING

Train upperclassmen to become tutors. Have coaches require tutoring for their athletes. Recruit from student clubs. Student tutors may be able to complete service-learning hours and/or earn elective credit. Student tutors gain leadership skills as well as enhance resumes and college applications.

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION EXAM PREPARATION

Graduation coaches help students prepare for state graduation exams. Coordinate a class for students who have not passed the exam. The most effective strategy is to focus on skill-building. Meet twice per week for the six weeks prior to the test. Use sample tests.

FRESHMAN/SOPHOMORE FORUM

Organize a forum for ninth and/or tenth graders who are not on track to graduate. Explain graduation requirements, what being off track means, and what students can do to turn things around. Enlist the help of current high school seniors who can mentor underclassmen. The seniors discuss the importance of graduation. They talk about the mistakes they have made and offer encouragement for these students not to take the same road.

AFTER SCHOOL CLASSES

A for-credit class can be offered for students who have failed classes during the first semester. Students receive assistance with homework, organization, work habits, test-taking strategies, and study skills.

“MASH”

MASH (Missing Assignment Study Hall) is held daily by the graduation coach during the lunch period. At-risk students routinely fall behind in classes. So, building in an opportunity to catch up is critical. MASH is equipped with computers, printer, microwave, school supplies, and math teachers are available to help tutor. Teachers refer students with missing assignments. Students attend MASH daily until the missing assignment is complete and turned in. If a student fails to report to MASH, the student and parents are contacted. Parents are usually helpful in getting students to complete the missing assignment. Often, students who did not like coming to MASH as freshmen will attend MASH in later years when they need to catch up on work. They realize the value of getting their work done to improve grades and pass classes.

EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS FAIR

Invite the most highly at-risk students and their parents to meetings with alternative schools and community agencies for optional alternative educational placements that may allow students to continue to work toward their diplomas while gaining other valuable skills.

The Education Options Fair provides students with one-stop shopping for alternative schools, community programs, post-secondary opportunities. It can often be enhanced by having community employers.

GOAL-SETTING AND CONTRACTING WITH STUDENTS

As part of the credit review and graduation plan, develop goals with students about their future. In collaboration with students, start with their own five-year plans and work backwards to establish concrete goals for the immediate future, e.g. what do you need to do this week, tomorrow, and today to accomplish your goals? Discuss what school staff and teachers can do to help support the plan. Have all interested parties commit to doing their part, sign off on the agreement, and follow up regularly to recognize accomplishments and adjust goals.

SOCIAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT

HOME VISITS

“I had a senior who needed just one-half credit to graduate. She came to my attention because she was not coming to school. I did a home visit on this student and continued to stop by her house whenever I was out doing other home visits to ensure she knew that I still believed in her and that she could still graduate if she came to school. I set her up with an online class because she had a full-time job and needed the flexibility. Unfortunately, she did not follow through

with the plan I had set up for her. I tried again the following semester. This went on for two years, right up to the month before graduation. I ended up doing 50-plus home visits on this student! She finished her class and GRADUATED! This was the highlight success story of the year for me.”

– Graduation Coach

When students stop attending school, they often go unnoticed. Meeting students and families where they are is an effective way to help break down barriers and help re-connect students to their education.

Sometimes, parents have little direct contact with the school because of lack of a telephone or lack of transportation to the school. For these situations, the graduation coach can bring program information directly to the parents. Home visits help the graduation coach understand the student’s living situation. Be aware of cultural values and traditions and respect them.

Know your district’s/school’s policy on home visits. The ability to conduct home visits and the policies and procedures for them will vary from district to district. The decision to visit students and parents in their homes should be carefully considered. Safety concerns may preclude visiting students and families in their homes. Some schools may require that a social worker make such visits, or visits are done in pairs. When possible, though, home visits to students who are not attending school or who have dropped out can be a powerful way to re-connect with students and families. Home visits can open up a new avenue of communication that parents greatly appreciate. Through home visits, students realize that the graduation coach knows they are absent and that they need to be back in school.

Venturing out into the community can reveal important information, such as popular skipping locations or danger spots in the neighborhood.

MENTORING

COMMUNITY PARTNERS AS MENTORS

By partnering with community organizations or businesses (United Way, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Chamber of Commerce) graduation coaches host weekly lunches or after-school meetings in the cafeteria or library. Interested students meet with community volunteers to discuss career, education, and college decisions. Small groups of mentees (up to four) allow for more relaxed conversation as well as allow fewer mentors to reach more mentees.

CARING ADULT IN THE BUILDING/TEACHERS AS MENTORS

Interested teachers serve as mentors to select students who have been deemed at-risk of not graduating. Teachers and/or other administrators each take on 5-10 students with the goal of getting to know them better, recognizing them in the halls, discussing school and life, and providing that little extra attention that helps connect them to school.

PEER MENTORING

Recruit juniors and seniors to serve as “big brothers” or “big sisters” to freshmen who have been identified as struggling academically or socially. Work with school clubs and teams to recruit mentors who can tutor or share life skills with younger students. Provide a weekly or monthly forum, over pizza, with discussion topics or guided lessons.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND CAREER PLANNING

CAREER ASSESSMENTS

Many students do not see much of a future for themselves and thus, their education seems irrelevant. Career assessments and interest inventories can help students explore what they might

want to become. Know the assessments and research tools your school, district or state uses to help students explore their future. Conduct individual sessions or partner with teachers for classroom workshops. Allow students to complete online assessments and facilitate discussions to generate interest in career fields for students. Explore salaries and education requirements for different jobs. This can lead to additional workshops on preparing applications and resumes.

“My office is a ‘one stop shop’ full of information! I have information on all kinds of programs, services, and opportunities for students and parents. People can come here and find out about alternative high school programs, post-secondary education institutions, where to get money for college, jobs, resume writing, and more. I’m a resource not only for students and families, but also for other school staff.”

– Graduation Coach

SENIOR PLANS DINNER

Seniors and their parents spend an evening at school having dinner and talking with local agencies and employers about their career plans.

CAREER EXPLORATION

Graduation coaches take students on career exploration field trips to local universities, colleges, technical schools, job services, and other relevant post-secondary institutions.

Coordinate with the business community to arrange mentorships and apprenticeships.

POST-SECONDARY OPTIONS

Host an event at the school so that students can discover post-secondary opportunities. Invite representatives from colleges, job centers, vocational schools, apprenticeship programs.

TRANSITION STRATEGIES

UPPERCLASSMEN MENTORING FRESHMEN

Once per week at lunchtime, struggling freshmen and sophomores meet with formerly struggling seniors. Mentors provide real-life advice, with a focus on social mentoring and “high school survival.”

MEET WITH NINTH GRADE CLASSES

Arrange to meet with ninth grade classes at least once each year. If possible, schedule 30-minute meetings on rotating basis, all year long, during homeroom or advisory periods. Emphasize strategies for success.

ATTENDANCE STRATEGIES

Many schools have school-wide attendance policies that may include automated phone calls, letters home, conferences, etc. Since students on a graduation coach’s caseload are likely to be struggling with attendance, make attendance part of the graduation plan. Have a check-in process for students, have them visit every morning. Create contracts and offer small incentives for improvement, call home for GOOD attendance, connect with parents to support students. Make it a joint effort.

Reach out to parents directly. Collect alternate phone numbers and call them all. Do not rely on automated phone calls or letters home—too many students may have moved, may delete a message or intercept the mail. When speaking to parents, address attendance as a concern that you would like to support them with, not a problem that they are being blamed for. Understand that they may be just as frustrated with the student.



Explore reasons for the attendance problem. Is the student being bullied? Are they struggling academically? Do they have problems with certain teachers or problems at home? Are they working too much or caring for siblings? Attendance problems are often just the tip of the iceberg—graduation coaches must help address the underlying issues.

Find out about the school's attendance policy and any programs that help enforce it, to better implement intervention strategies for students. For example, if a fifth tardy brings severe consequences, call students after their fourth tardy.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

National Dropout Prevention Center/Network

www.dropoutprevention.org

Search Institute

www.search-institute.org

Reclaiming Youth International

www.reclaiming.com

What Works Clearinghouse

www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ies/ncee/wwwc.html

www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/school-dropout-prevention.aspx

Unconditional Care, J.S. Prinson, K. Berrick, Oxford University Press 2010

The Minds of Boys, M. Gurian, K. Stevens,
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Reclaiming Youth at Risk, L.K. Brendtro, M. Brokenleg, S. Van Brockern,
Solution Tree Press, 1990 revised 2002

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inc. 1996 revised 2005

Under-Resourced Learners, R.K. Payne Ph.D, aha! Process, inc., 2008

One More Adult: Unlocking the Potential of High-Risk Youth is a course for professionals who serve high-risk youth within an educational setting. Course content aligns with and expands upon the content of this guide. The course introduces strategies for reducing dropout, increasing school success and graduation, improving attendance, creating post-secondary plans, and empowering self-advocacy. For more information, contact:

Susan Magestro
P. O. Box 221993
Anchorage, Alaska 99522
907-529-7151
sulamaestra@gmail.com

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JOB DESCRIPTION

This is a sample job description for a graduation support position. It is important that the job description be aligned with program goals. It should be shared with and understood by district and school administration and by key players.

Title: **Graduation Support Coordinator (Graduation Coach)**

Organizational Unit: High School Education

Reports to: Reports to high school unit principal Bargaining Unit: (if applicable)

Compensation: (Salary Range) Work Year: ____ Days

Position Summary Statement

Graduation Support Coordinators (Graduation Coaches) are an integral part of a comprehensive program of monitoring and support of students (grades 9-12) identified through analysis of risk factors in achieving the goal of graduation from high school. Coordinators will be responsible for working directly with identified students. In addition, coaches will work cooperatively with the principal of the school and the central office to identify supports for these students. Such services might include after school tutoring for students at academic risk, facilitation of mentoring relationships in the workforce, referral to support services in the community if necessary, sustained meetings with students and families to keep the whole family engaged in the support of the student's graduation goal, etc.

Essential Duties and Responsibilities:

1. In collaboration with teachers, counselors, parents and administrators, identifies students at risk of dropping out and in need of intervention. Identifies and assists in the implementation of intervention strategies.
2. Conducts outreach activities designed to increase parental awareness and to assist students in seeing the importance and relevance of their education such as parent orientations, home visits, and coordination with the business community in arranging mentorships and apprenticeships.
3. Provides outreach and follow-up support to students and families through a variety of communication means to include in-person, telephonic, electronic, and home visits.
4. Acts as mentor to specified at-risk students by connecting with students and establishing a rapport that allows for open communication.
5. Maintains and facilitates coordinated communication between the building principal, teachers and other resource staff on dropout prevention/intervention methods and results.
6. Collaborates with school counselors and career resource advisors in assisting identified students in the development of individual learning plans (or post graduation commitment plans).
7. Connects with middle school counselors each spring to identify incoming students in need of support.
8. Creates and maintains confidential program records and organizational systems. Tracks student risk factors associated with dropping out to include attendance and truancy data, discipline data, and academic achievement data
9. Compiles data for tracking and evaluation purposes.
10. Identifies and monitors students who have dropped out and encourages them to re-engage in school.
11. May perform other related duties as assigned.

Minimum Qualifications: Knowledge of cultures, and various communication and learning styles, available community resource services to which students and families may be referred. Demonstrated skills in communication, assessment, evaluation, plan implementation and record maintenance. Ability to relate to and work successfully with at-risk students, parents, school staff and community resource staff. Ability to work independently and as a collaborative team member.

Education and/or Experience:

Degree, license, certificate, experience as applicable.

SAMPLE DATA TRACKING TOOL

This is a sample of an Excel spreadsheet used by graduation coaches for tracking student data. It is important to align data collection with district and school goals, the job description, and available assessment tools.

Section 1: In this example, the district has an in-house tracking system for risk factors. Attendance, GPA, behavior, and course failures are compiled and a “total risk score” is generated.

Sections 2, 3, 4, and 5: This form shows how Excel can conditionally format a document; cells change color depending on the data entered. In this example, green and red cells indicate positive and negative data and trends for attendance, credit accumulation, grades, and behavior. The form is designed to track data at frequent intervals.

Section 6: Sample fields.

Be aware of the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations and district and state regulations for the use, storage, and release of student data.

[illegible]

Freshmen Credit Check Notification

Student Name _____ Student ID# _____

Current Credits earned towards graduation _____

This letter is to inform you that your student has failed one or more required core classes that are needed to graduate. In order for your child to graduate from the school district he/she needs to earn 22.5 credits. Each class is worth one-half credit. Students should earn three credits each semester and six credits each year in order to graduate on time. On the back of this letter is a description of the graduation requirements listed by subject and credit totals.

Students are also required to pass the state high school exam which is given in the ____ grade.

Attached to this letter is a copy of your student's transcript. I have highlighted any failed core class/classes that need to be retaken. The transcript is a record of all the high school classes a student has taken, grades received, and credits earned per semester.

Students should plan to make up failed classes within one year.

Some options for ninth graders to make up credit for failed classes are:

- Retake the class in summer school.
- Retake the class through our online offerings.
- Retake as a correspondence class online.

If you have any questions or need information for retaking a failed class please call me at 555-5555 or email me at _____@schooldistrict.org.

Thank you,

FRESHMEN CREDIT CHECK

Send a letter such as this to parents of ninth grade students. Ensure that all students and parents understand credit requirement for graduation.

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

This is a sample of a letter to parents of students on the graduation coach's caseload.



Graduation Support Coordinator Generic High School

Dear Generic High School Parent,

My name is Jane Doe and I am the Graduation Support Coordinator at Generic High School. I am currently assisting your student toward his/her goal to graduate with a high school diploma. I work closely with your student and with school faculty and parents to achieve this goal.

In my role as a Graduation Support Coordinator, I identify potential barriers to graduation, develop and implement individual intervention strategies, and work with students to develop a graduation and achievement plan to include the best program to meet academic and postsecondary goals. I provide direct student support and case management to match each student's individual needs. One of my main goals is to motivate students to focus on their graduation plan.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have regarding your student's academic path at Generic High School.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe, LMSW
Graduation Support Coordinator
Generic High School
Licensed Master Social Worker
555.555.5555
Jane.doe@schooldistrict.org

School Letterhead

Generic High School Parent,

Your student has been selected to attend our nine day extended semester credit recovery program, to be offered from June 1 through June 16. This class is open to seniors and juniors who have failed first or second semester core classes.

Students with a 50% to 59% overall grade average and a teacher recommendation are selected to attend this program. Students will have an opportunity to raise their F grade to a D by fulfilling requirements set by the extended semester teacher.

Students will attend school from 8:00 to 2:00 with a 30 minute lunch break. Food is not available so please have your child bring lunch.

The cost for this program is \$85. Waivers are available for those who qualify.

If you need additional information please contact me at 555-5555 or email Jane.doe@schooldistrict.org.

Thank you,

Jane Doe
Graduation Support

Student Name _____ ID# _____

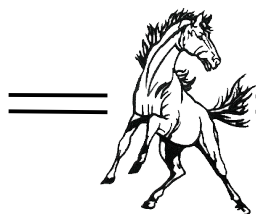
Subject _____ % _____ Teacher _____

CREDIT RECOVERY LETTER

An invitation to summer credit recovery program, with details about schedule, cost, and eligibility.

MID-YEAR CREDIT LETTER

A letter such as this can focus students and parents on progress toward graduation and on gaps that need to be filled. Ask parents to sign and return the letter.



Generic
School District

Generic High School
16525 Main Street.
Somewhere, AK 55555
(555) 555-5555

February 9, 2012

Dear Parents or Guardians of

Hope your student is off to a great start in second semester! Third quarter progress reports are now available and can be viewed in Student Information by clicking on "Marks." If you do not have a Student Information password, simply email jane.doe@schooldistrict.org or call Ms. Doe at 555-5555.

Credits earned also can be viewed in Student Information. Each class is worth .5 credit toward the 22.5 credits needed to graduate. Graduation requirements are:

- Language Arts 4 credits
- Social Studies 4 credits
- Mathematics 2.5 credits
- Sciences 3 credits
- Phys/Health Ed 1.5 credits
- Electives 7.5 credits

A detailed description of these requirements can be found in the High School *Student Handbook*. To earn a high school diploma, students also must pass the State High School Exam by their senior year.

Required classes failed must be retaken. Please keep in mind that students can take two classes during summer school. Online classes and other options can be discussed with your student's counselor. An opportunity to meet with counselors and teachers will be coming up next week at **Parent-Teacher Conferences on Thursday, February 16**.

Added academic support is offered in MASH (Missing Assignment Study Hall) during lunch daily and after school as needed. Math tutorials are offered Mondays through Thursdays during lunch and after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns, as I would like to see all students on-track to graduate.

Thank you,

Jane Doe
Graduation Support Coordinator
(555) 555-5555

MY GRADUATION PLAN

Name _____ Cell # _____ Date _____

I currently have _____ credits out of a possible _____ credits as a _____ grade student.

I HAVE NOT PASSED THE FOLLOWING HSGQE EXAM(S):

Reading _____ Writing _____ Math _____ Passed All _____

Credits & Classes I need to complete to graduate
(in addition to my repeat classes)

ENGLISH	/4	MATH	/2.5	SCIENCE	/3	SOC STUDIES	/
_____		_____		_____		_____	
_____		_____		_____		_____	
_____		_____		_____		_____	
_____		_____		_____		_____	
Elective credits needed _____				/ 7.5			
PE Credits needed _____				/ 1.5			

Plan of Action

I NEED TO ENROLL IN THE FOLLOWING PROGRAM(S):

Online Course(s) _____ Summer School _____ Work Experience _____
 XYZ Alternative School _____ Extended School Year _____
 XYZ Community High School Completion Program _____ Other _____

GRADUATION PLAN

Every student on the caseload makes a graduation plan. The graduation coach monitors progress and follows up on a regular basis. The graduation plan is the key ingredient for students on the caseload. Be sure to create one **with** the student, not for the student. Ensure that all players sign the plan and follow up.

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

A one-page planner for
postsecondary preparation.

Postsecondary Education

Career Choices

1.) _____ 2.) _____ 3.) _____

Postsecondary Options

Local University
Local VocEd
Local Career Academy

Job Service
Apprentice
Out of State College

Military
Work

Entrance Exam Dates

(MUST register **before** the test date)

ACT

September 8, 2012 _____
October 27, 2012 _____
December 8, 2012 _____
February 9, 2013 _____
April 13, 2013 _____
June 8, 2013 _____

SAT

October 6, 2012 _____
November 3, 2012 _____
December 1, 2012 _____
January 26, 2013 _____
March 9, 2013 _____
May 4, 2013 _____

Accuplacer

Open Testing lab
Monday-Thursday
(call for testing hours)
555-555-5555

Free Application for Federal Student Aide (FAFSA) --- January 2013

www.fafsa.ed.gov

Date completed _____

I realize that Mrs. Doe is here to help me graduate from high school and be successful. I understand the information that we went over, and realize that if I have any questions, I can come to her for additional assistance.

Student Signature _____

Date _____

Generic High School

16525 Main Street.
Cite, State 55555
(555) 555-5555

January 9, 2012

Happy New Year!

Your student is invited to attend an **after school** “Guided Study/Success Class at Generic High. This class is designed to assist students with homework completion, organization and study skills. Upon successful completion of this course, students can earn .5 elective credit. The class will be led by Generic High teacher, Joe Brown and Generic High Graduation Coach, Jane Doe.

Class will meet three days per week (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday) at Generic High School from 2:10 – 3:00. **Attendance is mandatory** for the course and for earning elective credit.

This is a tremendous opportunity for our students! We would like to invite _____ to attend this course. The first day of the class is **Tuesday, January 31, 2012**. **Space is limited**. Please contact Jane Doe to confirm enrollment for your student.

Thank you for your support and we look forward to hearing from you. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe

Graduation Coach
Generic High School
555-555-5555
Doe_jane@schooldistrict.org

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

This letter introduces parents and students to a special program developed and led by the graduation coach.

STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET

The student information sheet is kept on file for each student on the caseload.

Student Information

Name _____ ID# _____ Cell# _____

Parent Contact _____ Hm# _____ Cell# _____

Age _____ Birth date _____ Email _____

Counselor _____ Current Credit Total _____

Graduation Test pass/no pass reading _____ writing _____ math _____

Family History –

Interests / Hobbies –

School goals –

Career goals -

Job training/work experience -

