

# Forgotten Youth: Re-Engaging Students Through Dropout Recovery

## Issue

Each year, thousands of Massachusetts students drop out of school. The path forward for these students is difficult, and failing to educate the next generation of workers and leaders has substantial long-term consequences for our shared economic and social well-being. Policymakers recently have devoted significant attention to dropout reduction; however, this agenda lacks focus on dropout recovery, the act of re-engaging and re-enrolling students who leave school before graduating. Without a more systemic approach to connect with these youth, educators will struggle to fulfill a commitment to educate all students.

## Strategy

Boston's Re-Engagement Center is a dropout recovery program that strives to re-enroll out-of-school youth through outreach, personal connections, and needs-based educational options.

## Research

The Rennie Center conducted a case study of the Re-Engagement Center (REC) in Spring 2012, the findings of which are highlighted in the policy brief *Forgotten Youth: Re-Engaging Students Through Dropout Recovery*.

## Findings

### Promising practices

- ☐ **A robust public-private partnership provides resources & support critical to the REC's success.** By pooling their assets, two partners pushed the work beyond what either could accomplish individually.
- ☐ **The REC is a welcoming and supportive environment that encourages out-of-school youth to re-enroll in school.** Staff encourage & assist youth who may not know what re-enrollment options are available.
- ☐ **Out-of-school youth who decide to return to school require appropriate educational options.** A range of options, some immediately accessible, is essential for keeping these youth interested in education.
- ☐ **The REC is a driver of reform for serving students at-risk for leaving school.** Information about out-of-school youth has pushed BPS to re-evaluate support provided to students at-risk for dropping out.

### Continuing Challenges

- ☐ **Information and data tracking is needed to demonstrate the impact of dropout recovery.** There is no formal information tracking to explain the REC's impact on graduation rates and district practices.
- ☐ **More systematic approaches are needed to evaluate out-of-school youth before re-enrollment.** Re-engagement procedures would benefit from entry assessments to better address student needs.
- ☐ **There is limited capacity in the school district to re-enroll youth.** Re-engaging youth often prefer to re-enroll in alternative education programs over traditional high schools, but seats are limited.
- ☐ **Formalization of the REC's work is needed to strengthen organizational capacity and sustainability.** Additional funding from diverse sources is needed to maintain and expand current operations.
- ☐ **The inflexibility of some policies disengages many students who are close to graduation.** Rigid credit hour requirements and MCAS administration dates create challenges to graduating with a diploma.

### Considerations

- ☐ **For school and district leaders**
  - ♦ Shape re-engagement around out-of-school youth needs by including multiple, flexible re-enrollment options.
  - ♦ Develop partnerships with experienced organizations working to support at-risk youth.
  - ♦ Create a supportive and welcoming environment for returning youth by finding the right staff and location.
  - ♦ Nurture open dialogue between re-engagement staff and district leadership to shape systematic change.
- ☐ **For community partners**
  - ♦ Use an existing understanding of out-of-school youth to partner with districts to address unmet needs.
  - ♦ Address financial stability at the outset to ensure maintenance of the program.
- ☐ **For state policymakers**
  - ♦ Support school districts in making re-engaging out-of-school youth a priority.
  - ♦ Encourage districts to develop or expand existing education options based on student needs.
  - ♦ Create opportunities for out-of-school youth to graduate by being attentive to their needs.