National High School Center

Across the United States, almost 7,000 high school students drop out of school each day. The National High School Center at AIR developed an early warning systems tool that provides accurate and timely data to identify students most at risk for dropping out of high school. The center’s tool allows districts to dig deeper into their data, see patterns, and uncover the reasons behind students’ poor performance. Administrators implementing the system say that the tool has focused their attention on how schools operate, calling the process “eye-opening.”

“I looked at [the center’s early warning system] as a way to get an idea of who those kids were that were at risk for dropping out,” said a Michigan Department of Education administrator. “It has expanded into really looking at how schools do their business day to day.”

The center’s early warning system is used in 68 districts in six states, and the center’s tool has been downloaded more than 20,000 times. The federally funded center operated by AIR serves as the nation’s central source of information and expertise on high school improvement and will run through spring 2013.

American Institutes for Research

American Institutes for Research (AIR) conducts and applies the best behavioral and social science research and evaluation toward improving people’s lives, with a special emphasis on the disadvantaged. A not-for-profit organization, AIR is a national leader in teaching and learning improvement, providing research, assessment, evaluation, and technical assistance to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality, effective education.

“Making Research Relevant”

SNAPPESHOTS
Research – Indicators of College Success. AIR researchers are
undertaking analyses that will shape the field’s understanding of the policies
and practices most likely to increase the number of students who graduate
from high school ready for college. The report, which will be released in
2013, explores the relationship between high school indicators (such as
attendance), when students took Algebra 1, whether students completed
four years of English language arts courses, and other variables on their
college attendance and first-year completion rates.

Design – Massachusetts Early Warning Indicator System. Every
Massachusetts public school student, from kindergarten to 12th grade,
is now designated at high, moderate, or low risk of meeting key educational
benchmarks. This early warning system model developed by AIR identifies
the key benchmarks at each critical stage—early elementary, late elementary,
middle school, and high school—that research suggests students must
meet to be prepared to succeed. The design allows schools to identify
individual students who need extra support and lets districts determine
the needs of schools based on the risk levels of students served.

Implementation – Chicago Public Schools, Career and Technical
Education (CTE). The Career and Technical Education Early Warning
System created by AIR provides Chicago Public Schools with real-time
information in a single location to target interventions to the approximately
20,000 students participating in CTE courses annually. To create the tool,
AIR interviewed and surveyed staff at all levels—teachers, counselors,
principals, and district administrators—to understand the type of information
they needed, when they needed it, and how they would use it to work with
students to improve their achievement.

Ongoing Support – Virginia Early Warning System (VEWS). After
collaborating on the development of a statewide system to identify high
school students who are at risk of dropping out of high school, AIR
worked intensively with two low-performing school districts to use the
data to intervene with at-risk students. AIR created a process—based on
principles designed to capture innovation—that brought the two districts
together to seek advice from each other. The process allowed the districts
to dig deeper, see the trends in their data, and think systematically about
how to address the issues contributing to their students’ struggles.

Beyond High School, Beyond Dropout Prevention

Once a student falls behind in fundamental skills, he or she is likely to
remain behind.

AIR designs early warning systems for each critical stage in a student’s
education so that struggling students can be given the support they need
before it is too late.

• Are students reading at grade level by the end of third grade?
• Are middle school students high school ready?
• How can you ensure that students are ready for college and careers?
• What indicators predict the likelihood that a student will persist
in college?

The answers to these questions are crucial to students’ success. States
and districts are currently using early warning systems designed by AIR
to find these answers. AIR’s analyses of predictive indicators of success
is shaping the field’s understanding of what it takes to prepare college
and career ready students who can flourish in the 21st century economy.