



The Vermont Legislative Research Shop

dropout-prevention programs, but “their effectiveness is unknown because they still have not been rigorously evaluated.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Vermont Programs**

In 2001 the Vermont State Education Board saw a need for high school truancy and dropout prevention programs. The Vermont Consortium for Successful High School Completion (VCSHSC) was created by State Education Board to respond to this problem. The VCSHSC has been working since 2002 in partnerships with school districts in Vermont to develop the high school drop-out prevention pilot programs with the following mission: “1) identifying the conditions underlying local truancy and dropout problems; 2) developing a strategic plan to address those conditions; and 3) guiding the implementation of the plan.”<sup>8</sup> Some details of the programs are as follows.

**Lamoille High School** started a program targeting students who drop out because of employment reasons. The program is engaged in a partnership with Vermont Jobs Corps that drove dropout rates down to 8.5% for the 2002-2003 school year, compared to a rate of approximately 25% for several years prior. In addition, 10 previous dropouts returned to school through “new articulation agreements.”<sup>9</sup>

**Brattleboro High School** has taken a three-pronged approach. For the educational curriculum, Brattleboro has hired a coordinator to “develop community based learning opportunities for students with a record of truancy, suspension, expulsion, etc.”. A community team made up of students and adults has focused on increasing aware

**Mount Anthony/Bennington** The pilot program has so far developed committees in the areas it has deemed essential: evaluation, communication, mentoring, academic environment, and curriculum. A summer program for troubled freshmen has also been established called “Bridges”.<sup>12</sup>



years of education.”<sup>20</sup> Students who participate in the program for more than one year are more likely to both stay in high school and attend college.<sup>21</sup>

The U.S. Department of Education established a grant program in 2001 to assist schools with annual dropout rates above their state average to implement research-based, sustainable, and coordinated school dropout prevention and re-entry programs. Grants are awarded competitively and support activities such as professional development; reduction in student-teacher ratios; counseling and mentoring for at-risk students; and the implementation of comprehensive school reform models.<sup>22</sup> All state education agencies involved must report annually to the U.S. Department of Education on the status of all activities and dropout rates for students at schools assisted by the grant program. They also must report annual school dropout rates for the two fiscal years prior to receiving funds under the grant.<sup>23</sup>

### **Alternative Schools**

The main purpose of alternative education is meeting each student’s specific needs. According to the Iowa Department of Education, the smaller the school size, the lower the dropout rate; thus there is a need for alternative schools to provide a means of smaller learning environments. In the state of Iowa between 1982-2004 the number of annual dropouts has declined from approximately 5,100 to 3,700 annually. In that time the number of alternative schools and programs has increased as well. Currently between nine and ten thousand students attend an alternative school in Iowa.<sup>24</sup>

In Oklahoma an alternative schooling program, Students Working in Active Pursuit of Success (SWAPS), was developed through state funding and has been successful at enabling high school dropouts to attain their diploma. Through the Oklahoma Department of Education’s grant of \$150,000 the program is able to pay for 7 staff to service 75 students per year. This alternative education program has an 87% graduation rate. To gain access to this program, students must be recommended by their high schools. These students receive instruction six hours a day for four days a week. Along with the instruction students can participate in CareerTech instruction,

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which offers an occupational skill that can enhance the chances of acquiring employment after graduation.<sup>25</sup>

Currently states are creating legislation that supports the use of alternative schools on troubled students. Illinois has legislation pending that will appropriate funds from the general revenue fund to the state Board of Education for grants to regional offices of education. They are also trying to make it mandatory for all expelled students from grades 6-12 to be placed in an alternative school. These alternative schools offer students who are failing academically or may have learning disabilities or behavioral problems an opportunity to achieve in a different setting. While there are many different kinds of alternative schools, they are often characterized by their flexible schedules, smaller teacher-student ratios and modified curricula. They are also trying to make it necessary for the local school board to approve the addition of any alternative school.<sup>26</sup>

## **Mentoring**

Mentoring is a one-to-one caring, supportive relationship between a mentor and a mentee that is based on trust. Tutoring, also a one-to-one activity focuses on academics and is an effective practice when addressing specific needs such as reading, writing, or math competencies. Many mentor programs are created from within the school; however, there are exterior programs that have been proven to be extremely effective.

One model program is the Teen Outreach Program (TOP), which is designed for children between the ages of 12-19. It involves them in various community services to prevent problem behaviors, teen pregnancy, and to enhance academic achievement. During the 2001-02 school year, TOP was being used in 16 states across the U.S., reaching more than 13,000 young people. In a study conducted in 1997 in 25 sites over a five-year period it was found that TOP participants were about 40% less