

AMERICA'S PROMISE ALLIANCE DROPOUT PREVENTION SUMMITS:

MOBILIZING ACTION TO ADDRESS THE
High School Dropout Crisis across the Nation

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- 1 Making High School Graduation and College Readiness a Priority
Dropout Prevention Summits
- 2 Highlights from Dropout Prevention Summits
- 3 Raising Awareness
- 4 Involving Youth in Meaningful Ways
- 5 Building Partnerships and Strengthening Interagency Collaboration
- 6 Leveraging Funds for Continued Work
- 7 Influencing Programs, Practices and Policy
- 8 Conclusions

MAKING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND COLLEGE READINESS A PRIORITY

A quarter of the nation's high school students do not graduate with their classmates.¹ For individuals, the consequences of failing to complete high school are severe. High school dropouts earn lower wages, are less healthy and are more likely to engage in criminal activity. The negative effects of dropping out of high school are not limited to those who fail to complete their schooling. States and communities also suffer because individuals with lower levels of education are less civically involved, contribute less in taxes and have a higher need for social service programs.²

To help address the dropout crisis, America's Promise Alliance has created Grad Nation, "a national movement to mobilize Americans to end the high school dropout crisis and prepare young people for the 21st century workforce." This movement draws on the strength of the Alliance to raise awareness, to mobilize action and to increase advocacy. This work uses a broad array of tactics such as the Dropout Prevention Summits, reports like *Cities in Crisis* that draw national attention to the issue, and an initiative to raise cross-sector collaborative work in 12 communities across the nation. This report focuses on highlights from the Dropout Prevention Summits.³

DROPOUT PREVENTION SUMMITS

In April 2008, the Alliance officially launched the Dropout Prevention Summit initiative. The goal of this initiative was to increase public awareness of the dropout crisis, to mobilize states and communities to take action and to increase high school graduation rates. The initiative was designed to engage multi-sector partnerships that would generate innovative and effective solutions. America's Promise Alliance awarded grants in the amount of \$25,000 for a state summit and \$10,000 for a city summit. To help extend the work beyond the summit, summit sites were required to submit an action plan shortly after the summit that outlined steps to address their dropout crisis. The combination of the summit planning, the summit itself and the post-summit action plan was intended to mobilize cross-sector collaborative action that would ultimately improve high school graduation and college readiness rates across the country.

The Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University is conducting an evaluation of the Dropout Prevention Summit, tracking the progress of each summit from planning through the 18 months following the summit. Throughout the course of the initiative, summit conveners, attendees and post-summit workgroup leaders shared their perspectives on the summit events. This report highlights the findings as of February 1, 2011.

¹ Heckman, J. J. and P. A. LaFontaine (2007). *The American high school graduation rate: Trends and levels*. Bonn, Germany, IZA.

² For a review, see Alliance for Excellent Education (2007). *The High Cost of High School Dropouts: What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools*. Washington, D.C. <http://www.all4ed.org/files/archive/publications/HighCost.pdf>

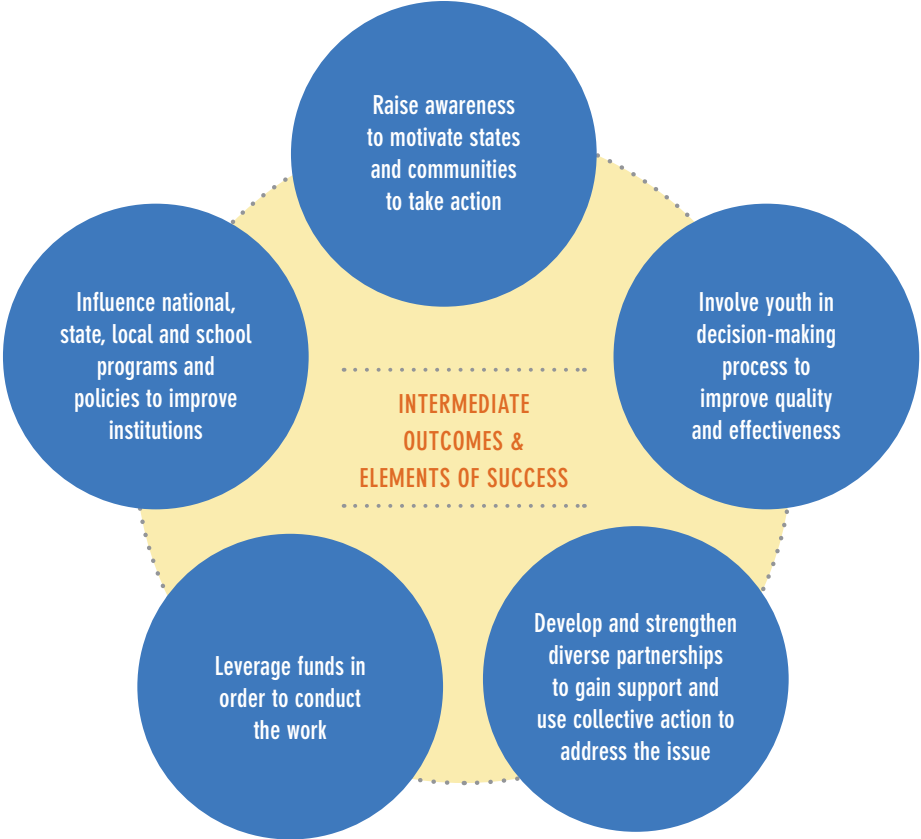
³ Additional detail on the Dropout Prevention Summits is available in the evaluation report. Gifford, B., C. Cogswell, et al. (January 10, 2011). *America's Promise Alliance Evaluation: America's Promise Alliance Dropout Prevention Summits*. Center for Child and Family Policy.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM DROPOUT PREVENTION SUMMITS

From February 2007 through December 2010, the Alliance sponsored 105 summits: one in each of the 50 states and 55 additional summits in cities with the highest concentration of “dropout factories.”⁴ The summits engaged key community and state leaders in multiple ways. For example, the governor’s or the mayor’s office as well as nonprofit and business organizations (such as United Way, Communities in Schools, State Farm and City Year) agreed to take a lead role in convening the summits. Moreover, the summits

attracted presentations by notable speakers, including 25 governors and 24 mayors. In addition to the resources contributed by America’s Promise Alliance, over \$1 million from multiple sources was donated to support summit-related activities. Nearly 2,800 organizations participated in summit planning and follow-up activities. The impact of the summits in raising awareness, involving youth, developing and sustaining partnerships, leveraging funds and influencing policy, programs and practices is examined in this report (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1:
Intermediate outcomes of the summits that are steps toward increasing the overall high school graduation rate



⁴ Balfanz, R. and N. Legters, *Locating the dropout crisis: Which high schools produce the nation’s dropouts? Where are they located? Who attends them?* 2004, Johns Hopkins University: Baltimore, p. 41.

RAISING AWARENESS

The summits were successful in achieving the goal of increasing the public’s awareness of the dropout crisis. The summits attracted 33,516 people from 50 states and 55 local communities. The number of attendees ranged across sites from 30 to over 2,000, with an average of 330 participants.

Attendees reported that the summit improved their knowledge of the dropout issue. They also indicated that, following the summit, they would be more likely to use effective strategies in their work to improve the graduation rate (see Figure 2). Perhaps more important, attendees said that the summit elevated the community’s sense of urgency and that more community leaders were committed to addressing the dropout issue following the summit.

Many of the summit sites attracted media coverage of the event, extending the impact of the event to the broader community. For example, both the Jackson, Mississippi, and the Cleveland, Ohio,

summits were covered on their respective local station affiliates of ABC, CBS and NBC.

Attendees shared a few examples of how the summit helped to raise awareness:

“In addition to policies and laws that may change through the work of the Governor’s Commission and the legislature, school districts around the state are sharing ideas for programs and practices in their schools. We learned a great deal from one another at our summit.”

*Workgroup leader from the North Dakota Summit
6 months post-summit*

“...The summit raised the visibility of the issue statewide to all sectors and promoted awareness and continuing action by stakeholders, foremost by school divisions.”

*Workgroup leader from the Virginia Summit
18 months post-summit*

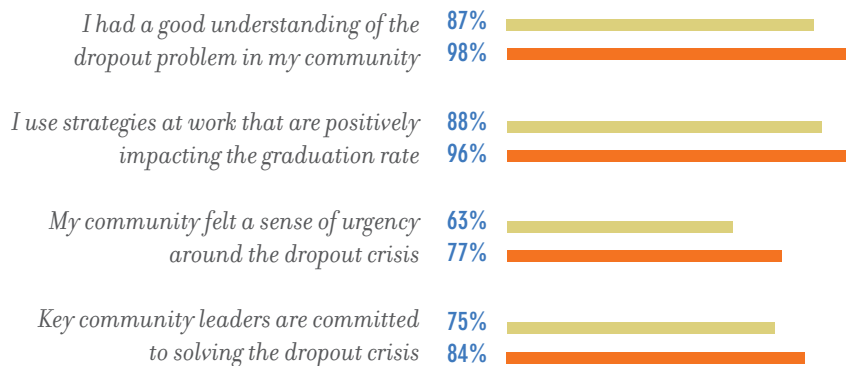


FIGURE 2:
Attendee perceptions of issues and knowledge related to high school dropout (pre- and post-summit)

■ pre-summit
■ post-summit

Source: Authors’ tabulation of the Dropout Prevention Summit Post-Summit Attendee Survey (n=10,533)
Note: Results of a retrospective pre-post design (respondents asked perceptions pre- and post-summit in the same survey). Percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed. (Differences all statistically significant $p < .05$)

INVOLVING YOUTH IN MEANINGFUL WAYS

Many summit communities involved youth during and after the summit. Roughly three-quarters of post-summit workgroup leaders indicated that youth had a strong and visible role at the summit. Youth participated in a variety of ways, including serving on advisory boards, giving presentations or serving on panels at the summit, and helping to develop the action plan.

Following the summit, about a quarter of the post-summit workgroups had worked toward hosting an additional youth summit. Post-summit workgroup leaders described how youth contributed in their communities. For example:

“Middle and high school students planned, organized and executed a family engagement event where approximately 50 parents attended”

Workgroup leader from the Nashville, Tennessee Summit 6 months post-summit

“Students who attended the Oklahoma City Dropout Prevention Summit cited mentors as the number one thing they wanted and needed in order to succeed in school. The United Way of Central Oklahoma is currently partnering with dedicated volunteers and community leaders to develop and coordinate a community tutoring initiative in the Oklahoma City Public Schools District.”

Workgroup leader from the Oklahoma Summit 18 months post-summit



BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS AND STRENGTHENING INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

The Dropout Prevention Summits were successful in promoting the development of new partnerships. For example, almost all post-summit workgroup leaders said that specific partnerships were strengthened during the planning and hosting phases of the summit. About two-thirds of post-summit workgroup leaders mentioned developing partnerships with nonprofit organizations, the education sector and the business sector.

In addition to helping partnerships form, the Dropout Prevention Summits appear to have had a lasting effect on partnerships. These workgroups vary in size, composition and meeting frequency, as well as in the goals that they have set. Nonetheless, six months following the summit, nearly all workgroup leaders indicated that the summit had strengthened the partnerships and increased the number of collaborative relationships. Workgroup leaders shared their experiences. For example:

“As a result of the summit, community groups have been formed to discuss issues related to dropout prevention. Our summit was a catalyst for the formation of these groups. One group in particular, in Wagner, SD, has begun discussing ways for members of the community to get involved (where they previously were not) to improve graduation rates.”

*Workgroup leader from the South Dakota Summit
6 months post-summit*

Similarly, among the 45 sites that have reached their 18-month post-summit anniversary, 80

percent continue to have a collaboration that is working on dropout prevention issues. Many workgroup leaders highlighted how important these collaborations are. For example:

“Inter-agency partnerships begun at the summit in 2008 have continued to build support within education, workforce development, advocates and philanthropy. These partnerships have also strengthened the ability to access policy makers.”

*Workgroup leader from the Michigan Summit
18 months post-summit*

“There seems to have been a more comprehensive appreciation for the variety of factors that impact dropout prevention effort. Communities seem to be more willing to accept a larger role in helping to address this ‘school’ problem, and schools seem more willing to partner with community. There has been growing support for service learning as a dropout prevention strategy and a growing use of out of school time programs for older youth as part of a dropout prevention strategy.”

*Workgroup leader from the Nebraska Summit
18 months post-summit*

“The summit helped bring greater awareness and engagement among all stakeholders, particularly city agencies serving youth, elected officials, community-based organizations, schools and students. With support from APA (America’s Promise Alliance), we have been able to increase youth engagement as part of our efforts.”

*Workgroup leader from the New York City Summit
18 months post-summit*

LEVERAGING FUNDS FOR CONTINUED WORK

The Dropout Prevention Summits helped some sites raise funds to carry out their work. About a quarter of the states and communities were able to leverage resources to carry out aspects of the action plan. Six months after the summit, 27 of the summit sites reported receiving grants from a diverse group of funders including businesses, foundations, government agencies and other sources. For example, two summits described the positive impact the summit had on funding:



“As a result of attending the summit, Bozeman High School got connected with the Bozeman United Way to secure funding for outreach to parents. The funding was competitive, but because of groundwork laid at the summit, Bozeman succeeded in getting funded. As a result of the summit, agencies are sharing funding in ways they would not have earlier, for example, sharing conference costs.”

*Workgroup leader from the Montana Summit
6 months post-summit*

“Used summit action plan as impetus for securing AT&T Family Engagement for High School Success grant. State Farm presented \$1,500 checks to each of our targeted high schools, and secured funding for business and youth engagement projects.”

Workgroup leader from the Jackson, Mississippi Summit 18 months post-summit

“We have collaborated on two grant proposals: Lumina Foundation (College focus) and NGA Graduation for ALL. We have been invited and have been able to send teams with diverse stakeholders on two TA visits: Boston, MA, and Arlington, VA. Leveraged resources related to extensive research for our Dropout Early Warning System (DEWS) from the Regional Education Lab- Mid Atlantic.”

*Workgroup leader from the Delaware Summit
18 months post-summit*

INFLUENCING PROGRAMS, PRACTICES AND POLICY

Six months following the summit, workgroup leaders are optimistic that their work will influence new policies or programs for schools, city or school districts, communities and states (see Table 1). In addition, several summit sites shared significant accomplishments that exemplify the wide range of strategies being used. For example:

- > Two summit sites reported coordination and centralization of state and local data.
- > Several summit sites indicated that the summit was at least partially responsible for new college readiness standards.
- > A representative from a state summit credited the summit for a new statewide policy related to supplemental instruction for students performing below grade level.
- > Thirteen summit sites reported the creation of a new program or initiative targeted at low-performing schools or students.

Eighteen months following the summit, workgroup leaders remain optimistic that additional accomplishments will occur to help increase the high school graduation rate. Many workgroup

leaders reported that recommendations made by the collaboration had indeed had a positive effect on school policies or programs, school district level policies, and state policies and programs. Workgroup leaders described how the work they are engaged in is having a positive effect on policies or programs in their community. For example:

“Our work has been taken up by our state’s Governor’s Commission on Education Improvement. It is very likely that many of our recommendations will become state policy or law. The commission is an extremely influential body.”

*Workgroup leader from the North Dakota Summit
6 months post-summit*

“A recommendation of both Louisville’s and the state’s dropout summits was to raise the mandatory age of school attendance to age 18. On February 16, the Kentucky House Education Committee voted to send the bill to the full House. The governor is highly supportive and will sign the bill if it is passed; the vote has not yet occurred.”

*Workgroup leader from the Louisville, Kentucky,
Summit 18 months post-summit*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
School policies or programs (n=64)	0%	3%	52%	36%	9%
City or school district policies (n=64)	3%	5%	52%	25%	16%
Community practices or programs (n=66)	2%	5%	55%	33%	6%
State policies* (n=29)	3%	0%	52%	28%	17%
State programs* (n=29)	0%	0%	48%	28%	24%

Source: Six-month post-summit survey. *These reflect responses from state summit conveners.

TABLE 1. Summit convener perceptions: Will recommendations made by the collaboration result in new policies and/or programs?

CONCLUSIONS

The Dropout Prevention Summit initiative was successful in engaging community and state leaders across the country to bring together a diverse coalition of stakeholders to address this crisis. The summits raised awareness by attracting over 33,000 attendees from a range of sectors and by attracting media coverage on this important issue. Youth were involved in the summit planning and have been included in the development of action strategies. Partnerships around dropout prevention have been developed and strengthened as a result of the summits. Following the summits, there is substantial evidence that the partnerships are

being sustained. While not all summit sites have successfully leveraged funds, about a quarter of summit sites have raised additional dollars to continue their work. Many workgroups across the nation are successfully changing programs, practices and policies, and they are optimistic that the recommendations they set forth will continue to influence future decisions. Although not all summit sites are sharing the same level of success, there is reason to believe that this relatively light-touch approach on the part of the America's Promise Alliance is strengthening enduring multi-sector collaborative action in the communities.







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