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FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Social and Emotional Training as Part of Dropout Prevention

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Topic: Dropout Prevention

Practice: Social/Behavior Programs

Highlights

- Students who drop out tend to have academic, social, behavioral, and/or emotional issues that may interfere with their ability to concentrate, learn, and do homework.
- Schools may solicit the assistance of independent agencies to provide emotional support and training for students.
- Schools can reinforce positive social behaviors in daily interactions with students.
- Students who are at greatest risk of dropping out will likely benefit most from social programs and services.

About the Interviewee

Russell W. Rumberger is Professor of Education in the Gevirtz Graduate School of Education at the University of California (UC) Santa Barbara and former Director of the UC Linguistic Minority Research Institute (UC LMRI). He received a Ph.D. in Education, an M.A. in Economics from Stanford University, and a B.S. in Electrical Engineering from Carnegie-Mellon University. A faculty member at UCSB since 1987, Professor Rumberger, has published

widely in several areas of education: education and work, the schooling of disadvantaged students, school effectiveness, and education policy. He has been conducting research on school dropouts for the past 25 years and has written over 40 research papers and essays on the topic. He was a member on the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences panel that produced the Dropout Prevention Practice Guide (2008). He currently serves on two NRC Committees: the Committee on Improved Measurement of High School Dropout and Completion Rates: Expert Guidance on Next Steps for Research and Policy; and the Committee on the Impact of Mobility and Change on the Lives of Young Children, Schools, and Neighborhoods. He also serves on the national advisory committee for the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) project, Gubernatorial Action for Dropout Prevention and Recovery. He is currently directing the California Dropout Research Project, which is producing a series of reports and policy briefs about the dropout problem in California and a state policy agenda to improve California's high school graduation rate (<http://lmri.ucsb.edu/dropouts/>).

Full Transcript

My name is Russ Rumberger. I'm a Professor of Education at the University California, Santa Barbara. I direct the California Dropout Research Project, and I was the member of IES panel that produced the Practice Guide on Dropout Prevention.

One of the characteristics of dropouts is that they— first of all, they're all individuals, so they have different needs and characteristics and potential problems, but the problems can range from academic problems only to social and emotional problems or both. In other words, there are lots of different reasons that students may be struggling in school, not attending school, and ultimately drop out of school. And at least some of them have to do with the social-behavioral side of their lives, not necessarily the academic side. And of course the two are related because if they are having social emotional issues or problems, it can interfere with their ability to concentrate, learn, do homework and things like that. So, it's one dimension of the problem that needs to be addressed.

So, the question is then if there are those kinds of problems or issues for the students, what can a school do about it? And there's two essential approaches, which is one of them is having outside agencies or outside services provide the supports that students need. And some schools may be able to do that through having a list of counseling services or independent agencies or whoever that they can refer either students to or families to, to provide those services. Or they can try to do something internal in the school, that is, provide some kind of support, training, or whatever that deals with the emotional-behavioral side of the problem.

And even within the school, then, I would say there are two approaches. One is the more formal one, and one is the more informal one. The formal one is in the form of a curriculum or training that students may go through to teach them some social skills to help them get along, to help them deal with whatever social issues are confronting them. Another way to do it is more informally, that is beyond the ten-week formal

curriculum, you need to use those skills or use those practices and reinforce them in your day-to-day interactions. There are some schools where most of the kids are probably doing well, most of the kids are graduating and progressing, but there will always be some kids who need extra support. So, in that situation then, I think setting up some kind of program that targets that group of students, however big they are, but let's say, in the schools where they should be a relatively smaller group, you could set up a program that addresses them in different ways, you know, through having counselors, advocates, or the like. That is very different, though, than schools where most of the kids could be identified as at risk. That is, where the school itself, some people might say, is dysfunctional or where there is just so many kids that virtually everybody would benefit from these kind of support services. That's a whole different strategy, in my mind, of changing your whole environment and, of course, much harder to do. The centerpiece of it, which is related to one of the other recommendations in the practice guide, is about creating this personalized learning environment. And what that means practically is essentially creating small schools or a small learning community or something that personalizes that environment.

Many kids who are at risk of failure have experienced failure in the past and maybe most of their school lives, and they've received very little positive reinforcement. Maybe their grades are not very good, maybe they've had behavior issues, they've been disciplined or whatever, and they haven't received much positive reinforcement and positive feedback. So, all students benefit from it, but I would say the students who are at greatest risk would benefit the most from it because they probably receive the least of it in their lives. So, one of the things that can be done—and this is really, again, just a function of the counselor or the person who may be providing some of this more personal counseling or support, but the school as a whole—is to have recognition. You know, to have—and it can be schoolwide recognition, it can be public recognition, it can be more private recognition. But I would say probably public recognition at least should be part of that package. So, just the way schools, for example, celebrate athletes or the top academic honors, there may be other ways of acknowledging students and recognizing them for other, maybe lesser accomplishments, but they can be made to feel important enough that they've also received them.