

Reengagement and Dropout Prevention

Why Students Drop Out

- Decades of research on school dropout reveals consistent early warning signs in student data that predicts students at high risk for not completing school (most notably, attendance, behavior and grades). These warning signs can also be viewed as symptoms, and thus understanding the root causes is critical to addressing and preventing dropout, at the individual and system levels.
- As highlighted in a set of seven national represented studies spanning 5 decades, [Understanding Why Students Drop Out of High School, According to Their Own Reports](#),
 - 49% of students felt **“pushed out”** (e.g., suspended, interpersonal conflict with teachers, failing grades and can’t keep up);
 - 37% felt **“pulled out”** (e.g., work a job to address basic needs, care for family members, pregnant);
 - 14% fell into the category of **“falling out”** (e.g., did not feel a sense of belonging in school, changing schools often/not feeling welcomed, did not like school/felt disengaged).
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools across the United States have experienced declines in enrollment due to the difficulties with engagement during virtual learning, as well as the social, emotional, mental and economic tolls that have been exacted on families and students. Prior research already demonstrated the link between [trauma and dropout](#).

Why Students Engage in School

- In order to engage in schoolwork, students must be physically healthy, emotionally safe and academically challenged. According to the [Rennie Center Reengaging Students Back to School Blueprint](#), students engage in school when:
 - **They Have the Opportunity to Attend** – Educators can help children succeed by working to address the environmental and policy factors that create barriers to attend daily and push students out of school.
 - **They Feel Known and Valued** – Every student deserves a welcoming, warm, positive, culturally responsive school environment that prioritizes and nurtures strong relationships among peers and adults.
 - **They Experience Academic Success** – Equitable access to a strong academic foundation coupled with appropriate individual interventions is critical in building academic confidence.
 - **They Receive Rigorous, Relevant Instruction** – Linking academic courses to career aspirations, connected with long-term goal setting, improves student engagement. This includes creating advising structures that support students in selecting courses and extracurricular activities aligned to their goals.
 - **They Are Encouraged to Return** – Students who drop out of school need proactive and comprehensive supports to bring them back. Educators should take time to understand each student’s unique strengths and needs, including the factors that caused them to disengage.

Reengaging Students in School

- Consider some of the strategies being utilized to [Address Student Reengagement in the Time of COVID-19](#).
- Ensure your school and district has a dedicated structure to carry out the work, such as a student attendance or dropout prevention team.
- Due to the complex set of circumstances students are grappling with, intentional multifaceted efforts need to occur in efforts to re-engage students. As students re-engage in school, many will require individual plans and attention from a student support team to successfully re-integrate into school and recover necessary credits for graduation. Consider strategies in this [Attendance Playbook for the COVID era](#).
- Consider using this systematic approach, adapted from [Attendance Works Strategies for Connecting with Students and Families](#) and [School Practitioner Community of Practice](#), to connect with students and families who have disengaged in the learning process.

Identify

- Identify each student who has not returned to school. Divide the list of students among school personnel by intentionally selecting staff - teachers, coaches, support staff, administrators - who have an established relationship with the student.

Connect

- Connect with each student by phone, mail, text message, social media or socially distanced home visit. Try using these methods various times of the day or on different days of the week. Offer to hold virtual meetings with family members.

Assess

- Assess student academic and nonacademic needs. Identify credits necessary for graduation, social-emotional strengths and areas of growth, college and career goals, work and/or caregiver responsibilities, physiological and safety needs. Utilize the KY [Early Warning Data Tool](#) to identify and monitor students at risk.

Partner

- Partner with community organizations to provide essential services and resources for families in need. Student needs may range from physical or mental health supports, food insecurity, housing, technology access and/or transportation.

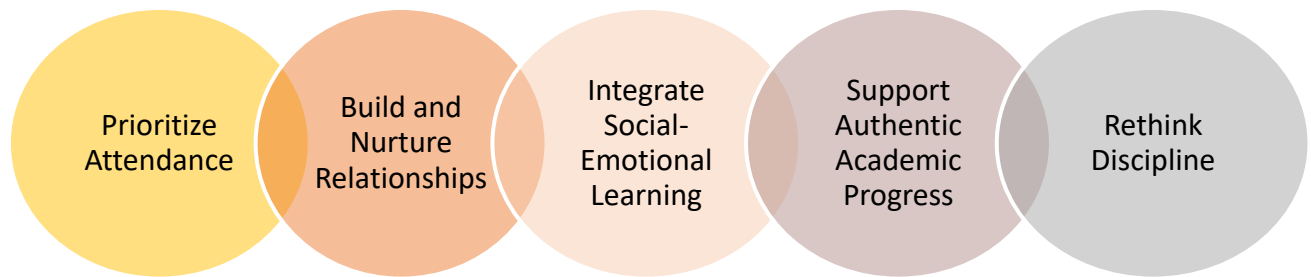
Rebuild

- Rebuild relationships with students by investing time on an ongoing basis. Connect one-on-one during a lunch break or through a quick check-in between classes. [Talk openly and without judgement](#) about why they disengaged and show students you care about both their academic and personal success.

Offer

- Offer flexibility to meet the needs of students. Consider credit recovery through individual subject learning packets, after-hours instruction on weekends and [evenings](#), or competency-based options to makeup full or partial credit. Utilize small group instruction based on skill deficit to expedite content acquisition.

School-Based Strategies for Preventing Dropout



● Prioritize Attendance

- Develop an attendance improvement process by forming a school-based attendance team to monitor data and address findings, meet with students and families to brainstorm solutions and provide targeted interventions. Utilize the [KDE Early Warning Tool](#), the [KDE Transient Student Report](#) and the [KDE Chronic Absenteeism Report](#) to help identify and monitor students in need of support.
- Identify and address non-academic barriers (*basic needs, health conditions, family factors, safety concerns*) preventing students from regularly attending school. Engage your Family Resource and Youth Service Center (FRYSC) and other support staff in an intentional manner (e.g., include them on an attendance team). Consider this [Intervention Action Planning Worksheet](#) and [Intervention Menu](#).
- Communicate the importance of attendance to students and families by sharing [information through print and digital medial sources](#) and calling home when students are not at school.

● Build and Nurture Relationships

- While it can be difficult for many students to initiate a conversation, they have a lot to share about their struggles and needs for support. [Don't Quit on Me](#) emphasizes the power of caring relationships from the student's voice, and provides a series of recommendations.
- Build trust with families by conducting [home visits](#), communicating positive news from their child's day, and personally inviting families to engage in classroom activities.
- Utilize school intervention specialists or [graduation coaches](#) to provide academic and nonacademic support. Coaches build deep relationships with students as they guide them towards making up missing credits, attending class regularly, and building academic and life skills.
- Strengthen student-teacher relations, increase student engagement and ownership of learning through [individual student conferences](#).
- Ensure students are familiar with these [hotlines and crisis support contacts](#) in cases where they do not feel connected to a trusting adult in schools.

● Integrate Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

- SEL is equally important for adults and students, particularly in these ever-challenging times. Consider ways to [strengthen the capacities of educators to meet the needs of students coping with trauma](#).
- Improve students' social and emotional skills, attitudes, relationships, academic performance and perceptions of classroom and school climate by adopting the [CASEL SEL framework](#) district-wide.

- Define a vision for SEL, assess current needs and resources and create a plan for implementation using [this guide to schoolwide SEL](#).
- Consider encouraging the use of [this guide](#) among staff in your school as it provides specific ways all teachers can integrate simple strategies and approaches that support students SEL development.
- Embed [SEL activities](#) into core academic content areas or teach through [stand-alone lessons](#).

Support Authentic Academic Progress

- Ensure learning is active, collaborative and culturally relevant to students by implementing strategies including peer learning, project-based learning, collaborative activities such as [Socratic Seminars](#), and service learning or [capstone projects](#).
- Apply [just-in-time](#) interventions to help students acquire grade-level content while addressing skill deficits.
- Make learning more meaningful by connecting core academic content to career readiness skills and personal goals. Check out the [KDE CTE Resource page](#).
- Reflect on current practices and seek new opportunities to [authentically assess](#) student knowledge during virtual and in-person learning.

Rethink Discipline

- Research is clear that exclusionary discipline increases the risk of dropout and harms students' sense of belonging in schools. These punitive approaches do not address the root causes of the behaviors.
- Often, problem behavior is rooted in trauma exposure and experiences that are beyond the control of students. Consider your disciplinary policies and practices to ensure they are [trauma responsive and culturally responsive](#).
- Implement [restorative](#) disciplinary practices. Shifting from punitive discipline to a restorative approach with constructive healing dialogue will require school-wide commitment and training for all school administrators, faculty and staff.
- Embed practices such as [restorative classroom circles](#), allowing students a safe space to express their feelings or a [peace path](#) that encourages healthy peer conflict resolution.
- Develop [class norms](#) to cultivate a sense of belonging and student agency.

* Adapted from [Rennie Center Reengaging Students Back to School Blueprint](#)

Additional Resources to Consider

[KDE Persistence to Graduation](#)

[KY School Safety and Resiliency Act Resources and Trauma-Informed Toolkit](#)

[KDE Chronic Absenteeism Resources](#)

[Opportunity Youth Forum](#)

[Trauma Responsive Educator Project](#)

[National Dropout Prevention Center](#)

[Everyone Graduates Center](#)