MARANA
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Governing Board Agenda Item

Meeting Date: January 23, 2025

From: Kristin Reidy, Assistant Superintendent

Subject: Graduation Alliance, Inc. First Amendment

Priority: To provide rigorous, relevant, and innovative academics

Consent   [X]   Action   []   Discussion []

Background:

The First Amendment to the Memorandum of Understanding between Graduation Alliance, Inc. and the Marana Unified School District No.6 and the original Memorandum of Understanding are attached.

The purpose of the First Amendment is to amend the pricing portion of the original agreement. In the agreement, approved by the Governing Board at the May 9, 2024 Regular meeting, the funding structure was designed with a goal of the District retaining 10% of the funding received per student once 15 students participated in this dropout recovery program. However, an internal review of the original pricing structure indicated that Graduation Alliance, Inc. had a funding calculation error in their formula and received more from the District than the goal stated. Graduation Alliance, Inc. has amended the pricing structure with the District's Financial Services Department.

In the original agreement, the District agreed to pay Graduation Alliance, Inc. $550 per enrolled student. In the updated amendment, the new rate the District would pay (dating back to September 2024) would be $533.40. The District would receive $16.60 credit per student for each student enrolled since September 2024, and the new funding formula would ensure the District only pays Graduation Alliance, Inc. a maximum of $533.40 for each additional student who enrolls in this dropout recovery program.

Below is the new funding formula:
The amendment is 2024-25 Arizona Base Support level (BSL) amount of $6,957.34.
This is the 24-25 Basic Level $5,013.00 X Support Lever Weight + District Additional Assistance $600.86 = $6,957.34

New Funding Model

Number of Students	$6,957.34 per student	Graduation Alliance, Inc. amount keeps per student
1 to 14	92%	533.40
15 to 39	90%	521.80
40 to 99	88%	510.20
100 or more	86%	498.61

The Graduation Alliance, Inc. First Amendment has been approved by District's legal counsel.

Recommended Motion:

I move that the Governing Board approve the First Amendment to the Memorandum of Understanding with Graduation Alliance, Inc.

Approved for transmittal to the Governing Board: _____
Dr. Daniel Streeter, Superintendent

Questions should be directed to: Kristin Reidy, Assistant Superintendent
Phone: (520) 682-4757

Amendment #1
to
DROPOUT PREVENTION AND RECOVERY
MASTER SERVICES AGREEMENT

By this Amendment #1, the parties agree to amend the Dropout Prevention and Recovery Master Services Agreement ("the Agreement") effective May 9, 2024, by and between Graduation Alliance, Inc. ("Graduation Alliance"), and Marana Unified School District #6 ("District"). Capitalized terms in this Amendment are defined either in the text of this Amendment or in the text of the Agreement.

NOW, THEREFORE, in consideration of the foregoing, the mutual promises and understandings of the Parties set forth herein, and other good and valuable consideration, the receipt and sufficiency of which is acknowledged, the Parties agree to amend the Agreement as set forth below. To the extent any provision of the Agreement is inconsistent with any provision of this Amendment, the terms of this Amendment shall control. Except as expressly set forth in this Amendment all terms and conditions of the Agreement and any amendments and addendums thereto shall remain unchanged.

Section 8 (*Fees*) of Addendum 1: (*Service Tier 4 Scope of Work & Pricing*) of the Agreement is replaced in its entirety by the following:

8. Pricing.

A. For each Student achieving at least one of the criteria defined in Section 6 above, District shall pay Graduation Alliance the applicable percentage from Subsection 8(B) of Adjusted Base Support ("ABS"). ABS is determined as follows:

--District's base level as defined by A.R.S. Art. 15-901(B)(2) (for 2024-2025, $5,013.00)
--*Multiplied* by the appropriate support level weight defined by A.R.S. Art. 15-943 (for 2024-2025, 1.268)
--*Plus* district additional assistance per student count defined by A.R.S. Art. 15-961 (for 2024-25, $600.86); *thus,* for 2024-2025 ABS is:

$$\$5,013.00 \times 1.268 + \$600.86 = \textbf{\$6,957.34}$$

Before the beginning of each school year following 2024-2025 Graduation Alliance shall notify District of District's ABS for that school year, which shall be considered incorporated herein by reference without the necessity of formal amendment.

B. The percentages of ABS payable by District under Subsection 8(A) are:

   (i) 1 to 14 Students: 92% of $1/12^{th}$ of ABS per student per month
  (ii) 15 to 39 Students: 90% of $1/12^{th}$ of ABS per student per month
 (iii) 40 to 99 Students: 88% of $1/12^{th}$ of ABS per student per month
 (iv) 100 or more Students: 86% of $1/12^{th}$ of ABS per student per month

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IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the Parties have executed this amendment below through their duly authorized representatives.

Graduation Alliance, Inc.	Marana Unified School District #6
10 W. Broadway, Suite 700	63 East Main Street
Salt Lake City, UT 84101	Mesa, AZ 85201

By: _____   By: _____
    Andy Cusimano
    Chief Financial Officer   Title: _____
    contracts@graduationalliance.com
                               Email: _____

Date: _____
                               Date: _____

Dropout Prevention and Recovery
Master Services Agreement
between
Graduation Alliance, Inc. ("Graduation Alliance")
and
Marana Unified School District #6 ("District")
(each identified individually as a "Party" and collectively as the "Parties")

A. Purpose.
The purpose of this Master Services Agreement (the "Agreement") is to capture the Parties' understanding and agreement for Graduation Alliance to provide services to District under Contract 23-09P-01 with 1Government Procurement Alliance ("1GPA") and operating ARS §15-901.06 for regular and vocational education opportunities for District's eligible students who are working toward course credits which can be converted to high school credits through the Dropout Prevention and Recovery Program (hereinafter referred to as "Program") operated by Graduation Alliance (enrolled participants in the Program are referred to as "Students").

B. Program Administration.
1. Tiers of Program Service.
The Program as operated by Graduation Alliance may be done in one of several tiers of service levels (each a "Service Tier"). The description and pricing for each Service Tier available to the District shall be attached to this Agreement as an Addendum and incorporated herein. District may select which Service Tier it wishes to utilize for each Student and may change its election once per calendar month per student.

2. Web Portal.
Graduation Alliance will provide the District with a web-based portal through which District can (i) select the Service Tier it wishes to utilize for each Student (i) monitor the Program, including enrollments, registrations, and progress of Students; (ii) review and access records of courses Students have taken; and (iii) review and access transcripts for Students (the "Portal"). The Portal also allows Graduation Alliance to custom-configure proactive alerts and notifications delivered via email and/or text message about various system triggers, including Student activity and progress.

3. Teachers and Accreditation.
All online courses offered by Graduation Alliance in accordance with this Agreement shall be taught by licensed teachers hired by Graduation Alliance. Upon District's request, Graduation Alliance will provide a copy of teachers' licenses, permits, or letters of authorization. Additionally, Graduation Alliance is fully accredited by Cognia, and all teachers, coursework, and Student support structures shall adhere to those requirements.

4. Final Exams and Course Credit.
The District will have access to the student's academic record, including electronic copies of the course completion certificates, through the Account Portal. Course credit shall be awarded to Students in accordance with the school district's board policies.

C. Duration.
This Agreement is effective from the date of District signature on this Agreement (the "Effective Date") and expires on the third anniversary of the August 31st immediately following the Effective Date. Thereafter, this Agreement automatically renews for successive one (1) year terms unless either party notifies the other in writing not less than sixty (60) days prior to the expiration of the current term of its intention not to renew, provided 1GPA Contract #23-09P-01 is still valid and in force. Under all circumstances, this Agreement shall be coterminous with Contract #23-09P-01.

D. Proprietary Right Ownership.
1. Ownership. Ownership of the Portal, services described in any this Agreement or any addendum hereto related to the Program ("Services"), tangible computer technology and intangible computer code necessary to deploy and serve the Services via the Portal ("GA Technology"), and all rights embodied within (collectively the "Proprietary Rights") shall remain exclusively vested in, and be the sole and exclusive property of, Graduation Alliance and its licensors. In addition, District hereby transfers and assigns to Graduation Alliance any rights District may have to any suggestions, ideas, enhancement requests, feedback, recommendations or other information provided by District personnel relating to the Program.

2. **No Modification or Adaption.** District may not make any change or modification to the Program, its curriculum, methods of delivery, or assessment, without the express written consent of Graduation Alliance. District initiated modifications which have not been consented to by Graduation Alliance constitutes a material breach of this Agreement.

E. **Confidential Information.**
To the extent permitted by the state of Arizona law, each Party agrees that it shall not use or disclose to any third party, except for the purpose of performing this Agreement, any business and technical information of the other Party which, in the exercise of reasonable judgment, should be recognized by such Party as confidential or is specifically designated, orally or visually, as confidential ("Confidential Information"). Confidential Information specifically includes, without limiting the foregoing, (i) the terms and conditions herein, (ii) non-public aspects of Graduation Alliance's Portal and the operation thereof, GA Technology, and the Services and additional services provided by Graduation Alliance, and Graduation Alliance business and technical information, and data, (iii) data and information provided by the District, and non-public aspects of District's technology, computer programs, and business and technical information, and data. The obligation of confidentiality shall not apply to information which: (a) is or becomes part of the public domain through no fault of the receiving Party; (b) is furnished by the disclosing Party to others without restrictions on use and disclosure; (c) becomes known or available to the receiving Party without restriction from a source other than the disclosing Party without breach of any Agreement with the disclosing Party; (d) is disclosed with prior written approval of the disclosing Party; (e) is independently developed by the receiving Party without the use of any Confidential Information; (f) is previously known to the receiving Party on a non-confidential basis; or (g) is required by court order (other legal process) or government agency to be disclosed, in which case, the receiving Party shall give the disclosing Party as much notice as is reasonably practical so that the disclosing Party may seek a protective order or other confidential protection as the disclosing Party, in its sole discretion, may elect and the receiving Party shall reasonably cooperate with the disclosing Party in disclosing Party's efforts to obtain such order or protection.

F. **Fees.**
Graduation Alliance shall invoice District monthly for all fees due and payable for services related to the Programs, and District shall remit payment to Graduation Alliance within thirty (30) days of the receipt of an invoice. As used in this Agreement, one (1) Student full-time-equivalent (FTE) is equivalent to one (1) student enrolled for one (1) calendar month.

G. **LIMITATION OF LIABILITY.**

NEITHER PARTY SHALL BE LIABLE TO THE OTHER FOR ANY INDIRECT, INCIDENTAL, SPECIAL, PUNITIVE, OR CONSEQUENTIAL DAMAGES. EXCEPT FOR GRADUATION ALLIANCE'S STATUTORY DATA SECURITY OBLIGATIONS, IN NO EVENT SHALL THE AGGREGATE LIABILITY OF GRADUATION ALLIANCE, IF ANY, INCLUDING LIABILITY ARISING OUT OF CONTRACT, NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY IN TORT OR WARRANTY, OR OTHERWISE, EXCEED THE TOTAL OF SUMS PAID TO GRADUATION ALLIANCE BY DISTRICT DURING THE SIX (6) MONTHS IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING THE CLAIM FOR SUCH LIABILITY.

H. **Indemnity.**

1. Graduation Alliance shall indemnify, hold harmless, and defend District against claims, losses, damages, and judgments of any nature arising from or attributable to Graduation Alliance's (*i*) breach of this Agreement, (*ii*) violation of law or regulation, or (*iii*) gross negligence or willful misconduct in performance of Program Services or Graduation Alliance's other obligations hereunder.

2. District shall indemnify, hold harmless, and defend Graduation Alliance against claims, losses, damages, and judgments of any nature arising from or attributable to District's (*i*) breach of this Agreement, (*ii*) violation of law or regulation, or (*iii*) gross negligence or willful misconduct in District's performance of its obligations hereunder.

3. The indemnity provided for in subsections (1) and (2) shall include advancement and reimbursement of attorney's fees and other legal costs incurred by the indemnified party.

I. **Miscellaneous Provisions.**

1. **Applicable Law.** This Agreement shall be governed by and interpreted in accordance with the internal laws of the state where District is located.

2. **Relationship.** The parties' relationship to each other is that of independent contractors. In no event shall the parties be deemed to have created a fiduciary relationship including a partnership, joint venture, or agency relationship.
3. **Entire Agreement.** This Agreement, including addendums hereto, represents the parties' entire agreement, superseding and rendering null and void any prior agreements, negotiations, representations, or understandings, written or verbal.
4. **Amendment.** This Agreement may be amended only in an addendum hereto or another formal written agreement signed by authorized representatives of both parties.
5. **Waiver.** No waiver of any provision of this Agreement shall be effective unless such waiver shall be in writing, signed by all parties, and then shall be effective only for the period and specific instance for which given.
6. **Severability.** Should any provision of this Agreement be found invalid or unenforceable, the remaining provisions of this Agreement shall remain in full force and effect.
7. **Assignment.** This Agreement shall be binding upon the parties' successors and assigns. Consent to assignment, which shall not be unreasonably withheld in any event, shall not be required in the event of assignment as a result of the acquisition of a party or substantially all its assets.
8. **Dispute Resolution.** Except as otherwise required by applicable state law, disputes among the parties shall be resolved in the following manner:
   a) Prior to the initiation of any legal proceeding, the parties first shall attempt to resolve their dispute informally, with representatives of the parties to meet as reasonably deemed necessary in an attempt to resolve their dispute.
   b) If the Parties are unable to resolve their dispute informally, the exclusive means of resolving claims under this Agreement or arising from performance of the Program Services shall be binding arbitration under the Federal Arbitration Act, in a proceeding before a single arbitrator governed by the Commercial Arbitration Rules of the American Arbitration Association. Judgment upon any resulting award may be entered in any court of competent jurisdiction.
9. **Survival.** In addition to other provisions which logically would be expected to survive termination, Sections G, H, and I shall survive termination of this Agreement.
10. **Notices.** Notices under this Agreement shall be effective if given to the signatories or their successors, or to any authorized officer of a party, via email or overnight mail to the addresses shown below with the parties' signatures, or in any other manner reasonably calculated to provide actual notice. The parties are responsible for informing each other in writing of changes to their addresses for notice.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have caused this Agreement to be duly executed below.

Graduation Alliance, Inc. 10 W. Broadway, 7th Floor Salt Lake City, UT 84101	Marana Unified School District #6 11279 Grier Road Marana, AZ 85653

By: _____
   Andy Cusimano, Chief Financial Officer
   contracts@graduationalliance.com

By: _____

Title: _____

Email: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

Attachments:
1. Addendum 1: Service Tier 4

Addendum 1: Service Tier 4
Scope of Work & Pricing

A. **Tier 4.**
   1. **Requirement.**
   Graduation Alliance shall operate Tier 4 as an education management organization and shall adhere to the requirements of A.R.S. §15-901.06, Dropout Recovery Programs ("DRP"), as outlined in the scope of services below. District is responsible for ensuring it is qualified to offer a DRP for eligible Students.

   2. **Eligibility.**
   Eligible Students are those who, if enrolled, would be eligible for placement in an alternative school but who is not currently enrolled in a school district or charter school and who has been withdrawn from a school district or charter school for at least ten (10) days, unless the district determines that the student is unable to participate in other district programs.

   3. **Enrollment.**
   A student will be considered enrolled when he/she has:
   A. Completed all steps of the application process established by District and the Program.
   B. A Written Learning Plan on file.
   C. Been accepted for enrollment by District.

   4. **Scope of Services.**
   A. **Recruiting Services.**
      i. Graduation Alliance provides student Recruiting Services for this Program, including the establishment of a student recruiting team, setup and configuration of recruiting systems, and active recruiting of prospective Students to join the Programs offered.
      ii. Within 5 business days of the Effective Date of this Agreement, The District shall provide a list of names and contact information (including but not limited to: child name, last known address, all contact phone numbers on file, State and District ID number, race, ethnicity, date of birth, grade level, cohort year, withdrawal date, withdrawal code, previous school(s) attended, free/reduced price lunch eligibility, IEP/504 information (if applicable), parent/guardian names, email addresses or other contact information on file in school records) of children who are eligible and pre-approved to enroll in the Program. Graduation Alliance will initiate contact to the Students via phone, direct mail, face-to-face meetings, and/or "town hall" style information sessions to inform prospective Students about the school's Program. After the Program's initial launch, the District shall provide names and contact information of newly eligible Students to Graduation Alliance as soon as the Students become eligible, and in no event less frequently than quarterly.
      iii. Graduation Alliance may recruit prospective Students who are not District referrals, however Graduation Alliance shall not enroll any Students who are not District referrals without prior approval by District.
      iv. Recruiters shall be employees or contracted service providers of Graduation Alliance. Recruiters shall have appropriate background and relevant experience and are required to successfully complete a criminal background check prior to any interaction with Students enrolled in any Program.

   B. **Course Access.**
   Students in the Program can access unlimited courses concurrently.

   C. **Academic Coaching.**
   Graduation Alliance will provide each Student enrolled in any Program an assigned Academic Coach. The Academic Coach is responsible for the initial introduction of the Program to the Student, regular contact with the Student via phone, email, SMS, or IM to review progress and resolve issues and to provide support in case the Student is having difficulties with the Program. Academic Coaches are available from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. MST, Monday through Friday, excluding US holidays. Academic Coaches may also be available during non-standard hours and on weekends, at each individual Academic Coach's sole discretion.

D. **Online Tutoring.**
Graduation Alliance will provide access to online tutoring to Students enrolled in the Program for courses in math, science, English and social studies. This tutoring is available 24/7 year-round (except Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Thanksgiving, and Independence Day) and is accessed through the Portal.

E. **Academic Services.**
Graduation Alliance will provide (i) graduation plan development; (ii) transcript mapping; (iii) transcript entry; (iv) learning plan creation; (v) course sequencing; and (vi) course enrollment to District for Students enrolled in the Program (collectively "Academic Services").

F. **Case Management and Student Support.**
Graduation Alliance will provide case management staff ("Advocates") assigned to the Program and will coordinate and integrate case management services and instruction. Advocates shall: (i) provide accessible, consistent social-emotional, and programmatic support to Students, as well as career guidance information, employment assistance, and referrals to local agencies and community organizations; (ii) meet with each eligible Student at least monthly to assess progress toward coursework completion and help mitigate barriers; and (iii) have at least a bachelor degree in social work, counseling, education, or a related field OR at least two (2) years' experience providing case management, counseling, social work, or other related direct services to at-risk individuals. For enrollment consistently more than 10 Students per month, the Advocate will reside local to the program and meet in-person with Students monthly.

G. **College and Career Transition Counseling.**
Graduation Alliance shall provide a College and Career Transition Counselor (CCTC) to meet individually with Students, as requested. The CCTC will work directly with the District's designee to ensure proper coordination around high school completion activities.

H. **Provision of Special Education and 504 Accommodation Plan.**
The District will be responsible for the provision of special education services to any enrolled Student who qualifies for special education in accordance with all state and federal law. Graduation Alliance shall provide common Special Education accommodations at the direction of the District and after evaluation of the student's current IEP.

The District will provide the same accommodations to reengagement Students under Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act as it provides to all Students otherwise enrolled in the District. Graduation Alliance shall provide common Section 504 accommodations at the direction of the District and after evaluation of the student's current 504 Plan.

I. **Provision of Multilingual Learner Services.**
The District is responsible for the provision of services to students who are eligible for English Learner services and are otherwise qualified for participation in the program. Any additional funds claimed by the District to serve this population shall be retained by District.

J. **Laptop and Internet Access.**
Graduation Alliance will provide laptop computers to any student who needs or requests one to complete Services offered in this Agreement. Computers shall be offered for specified Students' use during the period Students are enrolled in the Program. Laptops will be released to Students after a Financial Responsibility Form has been signed by the student's legal guardian. Parents/Guardians will be financially responsible for damage/theft to the laptop, or for failure to return the laptop if the student leaves, removed from or no longer eligible to participate in the Program. Graduation Alliance will provide internet capability based upon commercially-available services offered in the District's geographic region. Internet connectivity is offered on a monthly basis, and the service provider selected is at the sole discretion of Graduation Alliance. Internet connectivity may be revoked if enrolled student violates either Graduation Alliance's Terms and Conditions, or the Student Honor Code accepted by the student at the start of enrollment in a Program.

5. **Program Administration.**
Graduation Alliance shall develop and deliver to District a Policy and Operations manual detailing the expectations for students, the definition of satisfactory progress, the instructional model, attendance policy, student services, and how program exceptions are managed. Modifications to the Policy and Operations Manual, if necessary, shall be made annually upon mutual agreement of the parties and re-submitted to District prior to the start of subsequent School Years. District is responsible for gaining approval and adoption by District's Board or other governing entity in advance of the start of the School Year as needed.

6. **Monthly Enrollment Reporting.**
District is responsible for reporting monthly enrollment to the department of education monthly. The monthly participation shall be recorded on or before the tenth school day of each month and shall be reported to the department of education at the same time as other data required pursuant to A.R.S. §15-1042. Monthly participation calculations shall include:
   A. Newly enrolled pupils who have a written learning plan on file on or before the first school day of the previous month.
   B. Pupils who met the expectations for satisfactory monthly progress in the previous month.
   C. Pupils who did not meet the expectations for satisfactory monthly progress in the previous month but did meet the expectations in the month before the previous month.
   D. Pupils who met expectations for program reentry in the revised written learning plan in the previous month.

7. **Year End Reporting.**
   A. District shall submit the following annually by June 30th to DropoutRecovery@azed.gov:
      i. Signed and completed Dropout Recovery Program assurance document
      ii. Sample learning plan (provided by Graduation Alliance)
      iii. LEA definition of Satisfactory Monthly Progress (provided by Graduation Alliance)Documentation of their regional accreditation (provided by Graduation Alliance)
   B. District shall submit the following annually by July 31 of each year, in the form and manner prescribed by the department:
      i. The total number of students who satisfy both of the following requirements during the fiscal year:
         (a) Are continuously enrolled in the dropout recovery program for at least eighty school days.
         (b) Earn at least four and one-half credits or earn all the remaining credits that the student needs for graduation.
      ii. The total number of students who are enrolled in the dropout recovery program on or before January 31 during the fiscal year and who either:
         (a) Graduated before January 31.
         (b) Met all of the following requirements on January 31:
            (i) Were enrolled in the dropout recovery program.
            (ii) Needed three or fewer credits to satisfy the graduation requirements prescribed by the state board of education.
            (iii) Needed one or fewer credits in mathematics to satisfy the graduation requirements prescribed by the state board of education.
   C. District shall report by the end of each fiscal year the percentage of students who graduated during the fiscal year.
   D. District shall report by the end of each fiscal year the percentage of students who earned at least one college and career readiness indicator point during that fiscal year.

8. **Pricing.**
The Program standard reimbursement rates from District to Graduation Alliance per FTE per month for Students who were included in the Monthly Enrollment Report described in Section 6 above are as follows:

FTE	Tier 4
1-49	$550
50-99	$545
100+	$499

ADDENDUM TO DROPOUT PREVENTION AND RECOVERY
MASTER SERVICES AGREEMENT
BETWEEN GRADUATION ALLIANCE, INC.
AND MARANA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

This is an Addendum ("Addendum") to the Master Services Agreement ("Agreement) between Graduation Alliance, Inc. ("Graduation Alliance") and Marana Unified School District #6 (the "District") (cumulatively the "Parties," individually each being a "Party"). The Parties hereby agree as follows:

1.   The Agreement may be cancelled if a conflict of interest is present as set out in Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) § 38-511, the terms of which statute are deemed incorporated herein.

2.   To the extent applicable under A.R.S. § 41-4401, each Party warrants compliance with all federal immigration laws and regulations that relate to its Arizona-based employees and, with regard to such employees, agrees to comply with the E-Verify requirements pursuant to A.R.S. § 23-214(A). A Party's breach of the above-referenced warranty shall be deemed a material breach of the Agreement and this Addendum. To the extent required by Arizona law, the Parties each retain the legal right to inspect the papers and records of the other Party to ensure compliance with this paragraph.

3.   The Parties acknowledge and agree that the confidentiality of personally identifiable education records of the District's students ("Student Records") is protected and regulated by a federal law commonly referred to as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"). The Parties agree that any disclosure and/or re-disclosure of Student Records shall be in compliance with the requirements of FERPA.

4.   Notwithstanding any provision in the Agreement, the Parties agree that the Agreement may be automatically renewed for a total contract term of no more than five (5) years, after which any renewal must be in writing signed by both parties.

5.   Notwithstanding any provision in the Agreement, the Parties acknowledge and agree that the District is obligated to comply with Arizona law with regard to public records requests and that any disclosure of records that is required by law shall not constitute a breach of the Agreement. The District agrees to inform Graduation Alliance of any public records requests that seek disclosure of Confidential Information as contemplated in the Agreement before responding to the request.

6.   To the extent applicable under A.R.S. § 35-394, Graduation Alliance certifies that it does not currently, and agrees for the duration of the Agreement that it will not, use: (1) the forced labor of ethnic Uyghurs in the People's Republic of China; (2) any goods or services produced by the forced labor of ethnic Uyghurs in the People's Republic of China; or (3) any contractors, subcontractors or suppliers that use the forced labor of ethnic Uyghurs in the People's Republic of China. If Graduation Alliance becomes aware during the term of the Agreement that it is not in compliance with this written certification, Graduation Alliance shall notify the District within five (5) business days after becoming aware of the noncompliance. If Graduation Alliance does not

provide the District with a written certification that it has remedied the noncompliance within 180 days after notifying the District of the noncompliance, this Agreement will terminate, except that if the Agreement termination date occurs before the end of the remedy period the Agreement terminates on the Agreement termination date.

Graduation Alliance, Inc.   Marana Unified School District #6

By: By:

Its: Its:

Date: Date:

Effective Dropout Recovery Strategies and The Graduation Alliance Approach

Prepared by:

Ester Smith, Ph.D.

Cynthia Burrow

Prepared for:

Graduation Alliance

310 S. Main Street, 12th Floor

Salt Lake City, UT 84101

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1

Dropout Recovery Trends

A nationwide effort focused on improved dropout prevention has resulted in significant improvements in high school graduation rates, but myriad challenges continue to push students to leave school before graduation. Now, increased recognition of the high economic, social and personal costs associated with not having a high school diploma have driven a renewed focus on the importance of dropout recovery. Initiatives on the part of states and school districts to recover and serve students who dropped out, however, have often shown that districts do not have the capacity or resources to recover and effectively serve such students with effective programs.

There is general understanding and agreement regarding the characteristics and features of an effective dropout recovery program. This understanding has been refined with the increased availability of better data and more sophisticated research regarding dropout recovery programs, transcending the anecdotal information that was previously available.

There is also a growing recognition that the ultimate goal of dropout recovery cannot be limited to getting a high school diploma. The changing economy and the outsourcing of low-skill jobs necessitate the acquisition of post-secondary education and employment skills. This recognition has expanded the scope and partnering structure of many dropout recovery programs, which are now offering not only a high school diploma but also employment skills, certifications, and college credits.

1.2

Overview

Although the percentage of students who have dropped out of school, using the status/prevalence rate, has decreased significantly since 2000, when it stood at 10.9 percent, the dropout crisis continues to plague public schools in the United States (McFarland, 2020). As of 2018, about 1 in 20 students was still failing to earn a diploma (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). The status dropout rate refers to the percentage of individuals in a given age range who are not in school (public or private) and have not earned a high school diploma or an alternative credential. The rate is calculated using Current Population Survey data with supplemental information from the American Community Survey (ACS).

Reports additionally indicate:

• More than four million individuals, ages 18 to 24, have left school without earning a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

• The dropout rate widely varies by ethnicity. The status dropout rate for Asian students (1.9 percent) was lower than the rates for their peers who were White (4.2 percent), of Two or more

4 MILLION+

More than four million individuals, ages 18 to 24, have left school without earning a high school diploma

races (5.2 percent), Black (6.4 percent), Hispanic (8.0 percent), Pacific Islander (8.1 percent), and American Indian/Alaska Native (9.5 percent) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

- Dropout rates also vary by gender, with more males dropping out than females (6.2 vs. 4.4 percent) and within most racial/ethnic groups. In 2018, status dropout rates were higher for males than for females among those who were White (4.8 vs. 3.6 percent), Black (7.8 vs. 4.9 percent), Hispanic (9.6 vs. 6.3 percent), Asian (2.3 vs. 1.6 percent), and two or more races (5.9 vs. 4.4 percent). (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020.)

- The dropout rate also considerably varies by family income. In 2010, the dropout rate of students in lowest-quarter income families was more than five times greater than the rate of their peers from the highest-quarter income families (13.8 and 2.5 percent, respectively). In 2016, it was nearly four times greater (9.7 and 2.6 percent, respectively) (IES NCES Digest of Education Statistics, 2018; Chapman, 2010).

- The distribution of years of school completed by students who dropped out shifted between 2010 to 2016, as more students completed at least nine years of school before dropping out. In 2010, 32.3 percent of students who dropped out did so after completing nine or fewer years of school, 22.5 percent had completed 10 years of school, and 45.2 percent had completed 11 or 12 years. In 2016, 28.4 percent of students who dropped out did so after completing nine or fewer years of school, 21.9 percent had completed 10 years, and 49.7 percent had completed 11 or 12 years (IES NCES Digest of Education Statistics, 2018).

- Status dropout rates in the United States varied by geographic region. In 2014, the rates for 16- to 24-year-olds in the Northeast (5.3 percent) and Midwest (5.4 percent) were lower than the rate for their counterparts in the South (7.6 percent). The status dropout rate for those in the West (6.8 percent) was not measurably different from the rate for those in any other region (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

- About 40 percent of students who leave school before earning a diploma come from single-parent homes, and about 75 percent have someone in their household with at least a high school diploma (Scott, 2015).

While a great deal of research has historically been available on dropout prevention, research on dropout recovery programs tends to be newer and, until recently, mostly has relied on anecdotal data. Research, however, has pointed to certain strategies and activities that have been demonstrated to have a positive effect on the recovery and persistence of students who have previously dropped out of high school.

These strategies and activities are described individually in this report, and generally fall under three broad concepts: Flexibility, Accountability and Support. The following charts summarize specific strategies used by successful dropout recovery and re-entry programs and the approaches taken by Graduation Alliance to incorporate each strategy into its program.

flexibility + accountability + support

Certain strategies and activities are emphasized again and again as having had a positive effect on the recovery and persistence of students who had dropped out of high school. These strategies generally fall under three broad concepts: **flexibility, accountability** and **support.**

Flexibility: Serving this highly vulnerable and highly variable population of students requires the ability to address challenges quickly, effectively, and in ways that are inherently motivational.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS	THE GRADUATION ALLIANCE APPROACH
Recruitment through Multiple Channels: Programs must use multiple strategies for identifying and recruiting this demographically diverse and often-mobile population of students.	Graduation Alliance handles recruitment from start to finish, using multiple methods to locate and recruit as many disengaged students as possible including phone calls, text messages, mailed letters, emails, community visits, and Spanish-speaking recruiters.
Tailored Program Options: Students drop out for a variety of reasons; successful programs identify the specific challenges associated with the dropout event and present a program customized to resolve each set of challenges.	Intake procedures identify specific reasons for dropping out. Program staff tailor interventions and supports based on these reasons and adapt the program in a timely manner as academic and personal challenges occur.
Anywhere, Anytime Learning: Students who have disengaged tend not to be able to return to a regular school and require learning solutions that work within their schedules.	Graduation Alliance's technology-rich environment includes a laptop with program-provided 4G wireless internet service and connectivity to licensed teachers, personal academic coaches, and 24/7 tutors. This provides both high-quality instruction and comprehensive support at a place and time convenient for students who cannot or will not return to a traditional facility-based program.
Accelerated Learning: Students who have left school before graduation may be daunted by the number of credits required to receive a high school diploma; enabling them to recoup credits more quickly than a traditional school year can be highly motivational.	Course credits are strictly based on academic performance and effort; students work year-round and there is no limit to how many credits a student can earn.

Accountability: Every aspect of the dropout recovery program — from staff, to process, to curriculum — must aspire to be of the highest quality possible by maintaining accountability for outcomes as well as processes.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS	THE GRADUATION ALLIANCE APPROACH
High Standards: Students are held to the same high standards as students in regular schools, are aware of these standards and the consequences of not meeting them, and are held to consistent, clear consequences when standards are not met.	Academic and behavioral expectations are clearly spelled out, and students must agree to them before they can be enrolled. Each student receives a personal learning plan that sets a manageable pace toward graduation, progress toward which students and their supporters can view in real-time through their dashboard. Progress is regularly monitored, and intervention occurs in a timely manner. Students must complete two courses per month, which exceeds the pace of credit accrual for most students in most districts. Students must also complete the same requirements as other students in the sponsoring district, including passing state end-of-course or graduation exams where applicable.
High-Quality Instructional Materials: Curriculum and instruction is standards-based, student-centered, and grounded in experiences related to students' lives.	All courses are teacher-led and aligned to state standards. Criteria for developing and selecting courses are based on high standards and best practice in instructional design, pedagogy, and content area to facilitate student learning and engagement. The curriculum instructional design is informed by research-based principles and best practices as well as the Quality Matters K-12 Online and Blended Learning Rubric. The instructional program and materials are regularly reviewed by the Northwest Accreditation Commission, a division of AdvancEd/Cognia.
Frequent Assessment and Remediation: Students' academic progress is assessed frequently, but more importantly, specific interventions are implemented in a timely manner when students' academic success is in jeopardy.	Teachers provide feedback and actively facilitate learning, which promotes critical thinking within a learning community model. Student progress is instantly accessible to students and all members of their support team through the online environment. Clear procedures for academic intervention are articulated and implemented at every level.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS	THE GRADUATION ALLIANCE APPROACH
High-Quality, Well-Trained Staff: Instructional staff demonstrates expertise in their content areas. Staff also receive ongoing training in effective curriculum and instruction, addressing the special needs of the dropout population.	Graduation Alliance hires highly qualified, credentialed instructors, advocates, and academic coaches who are held accountable for student success. In addition to comprehensive initial training, teams meet weekly for professional development.
Continuous Program Improvement: Programs must engage in routine, comprehensive program evaluation activities using high-quality data in order to make program adjustments and modifications.	Departmental and inter-departmental teams review student performance data regularly to make minor course corrections. Graduation Alliance's management team and board use a variety of metrics to set priorities and implement any substantive changes needed.
Maintenance of Quality: Programs provide consistent quality in the services they offer irrespective of available funding or number of students requesting services.	Most of the costs associated with the program are tied to the student. In addition, the use of technology facilitates the accommodation of increasing numbers of students without sacrificing program rigor or quality.

Support: The dropout population often faces overwhelming academic and social obstacles. Successful programs build and maintain intensive support networks to address both areas of student need.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS	THE GRADUATION ALLIANCE APPROACH
Adults Who Care: Students receive ongoing personal support from instructional staff and mentors/coaches who truly believe in them and have a keen interest in their success.	All staff members are screened to ensure an inherent motivation to help at-risk students succeed. Staff members are encouraged to frequently communicate their pride and concern for students, and celebrate both immediate and long-term student successes.
Case Management Approach: Each student receives tailored interventions that address their social and academic needs; follow up is frequent.	Staff members work from students' intake interviews to craft customized academic plans and social supports. Staff members review academic performance routinely and communicate with students frequently. Staff also communicate with each other about potential social and academic challenges and work together to develop solutions for the student.
Parental Support: Programs build capacity for parents to become engaged in and support their children's educational progress.	Parents and guardians are provided online access to their student's academic records through a designated FERPA-compliant private portal. Parents can receive home visits, if such visits are deemed necessary to a student's success.
Life Planning: Students' aspirations are validated and supported through careful planning and frequent, productive follow-up.	Each student is provided access to, and receives counseling for, a suite of college and career-planning services that align interests and aptitudes with post-secondary plans. Students are assisted in identifying post-secondary educational opportunities, completing applications, applying for scholarships, and preparing for employment.
One-On-One Instruction: Students are not simply seats in a class; frequent opportunities for one-on-one academic support are available.	Graduation Alliance provides myriad academic resources, including personalized academic support through each student's academic coach, and 24/7 access to one-on-one tutoring.

2
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THE COST OF DROPPING OUT

Dropping out of high school has long-term negative economic and social consequences. Students who leave school before graduation often find themselves at a significant disadvantage, marginalized, and on the fringes of society. Individuals without a high school diploma are more likely than high school graduates to have lower incomes; pay less in taxes; be periodically unemployed, especially during economic downturns; be on government healthcare and welfare programs; and be in and out of the prison system. Dropping out also negatively impacts the country's ability to compete in an increasingly global economy.

1

Economic Cost

The cost of dropping out of high school has long been described in terms of the personal earning power of students who drop out versus those who graduate from high school (Rumberger, 1987). Completing high school is considered a desirable educational outcome both for the individual and society. Personal income impacts the national economy in myriad ways, expressed as lost economic opportunities, fiscal costs from foregone tax revenues, and public costs associated with crime, public health services, and welfare (Levin, 2012). Several studies have offered a number of staggering statistics to describe the long-term, devastating economic impact the current dropout rate can have in the short and long term. For example:

• Under current economic conditions, living-wage jobs that require less than a high school education have been almost completely eliminated. As the required skill level continues to rise, individuals who do not have a high school diploma are at a great disadvantage (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2018). Some two-thirds of jobs now require at least some post-secondary education (Carnevale, 2014).

• The lifetime cost of not earning a high school diploma has been estimated at $258,240 per individual. The cost to society in foregone tax revenues, higher crime, healthcare, and welfare costs is estimated at $755,900 (Levin, 2012).

• Individuals without a diploma earn about $9,200 a year less than high school graduates and $33,500 a year less than college graduates. Individuals without a diploma are almost three times more likely to be unemployed than college graduates. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018.)

• About a third of those who have dropped out of school are working full-time. These individuals are disproportionally male (64 percent vs. 54 percent of those not working), Hispanic (41 percent vs. 29 percent), do not live with a parent (34 percent vs. 21 percent), and are more likely to have discontinued their education before even starting high school (24 percent vs. 17 percent). About 25 percent are first-generation immigrants. They live in larger households, with less educated adults, and have a harder time accessing support relative to individuals of similar economic circumstances, with lower rates of government assistance. (American Community Survey, 2008-2012).

• Individuals with less than a high school education have the highest unemployment rate at 5.4 percent, compared with 3.7 percent of high school graduates, 3.3 percent of those with some college education but no degree, and 2.2 percent of those with a bachelor's degree. The weekly usual median earnings of individuals with less than high school education are $592 compared with $746 of those who graduated from high school and $1,248 for those with a bachelor's degree. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020.)

- As the United States was pulling out of the 2007-2009 recession, the unemployment rate for individuals without a high school diploma stood at 14.3 percent compared with 9.6 percent for high school graduates, 8.2 percent for those with some college, and 4.3 percent for those with a bachelor or more advanced degrees (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011).

- Women who dropped out of high school earn only about 65 percent of the income of their counterparts who have graduated; male individuals who have dropped out earn slightly less than 70 percent (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

- Annually, those who have dropped out of school pay about 58 percent less in federal and state income taxes; assuming a dropout cohort of 600,000 eighteen-year-olds, this equates to a yearly loss of $36 billion (Rouse, 2007).

- Individuals without a high school diploma are more likely to rely on social programs such as welfare throughout their lives (Woods, 1995). A study of families receiving federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families found that half of all single-mother TANF recipients had dropped out of high school, positing that if all welfare recipients had completed high school, the annual savings to these programs would approach $2 billion (Waldfogel, et. al., 2007).

- Individuals without a high school diploma in the United States live an average of 9.2 fewer years than high school graduates. Those who have dropped out of high school also have higher rates of cardiovascular illnesses, diabetes, and other ailments, and require an average of $35,000 in annual health-care costs, compared with $15,000 for college graduates (Alliance for Excellence Education, 2011).

- Public health insurance spending is nearly 30 percent more for those who have dropped out of high school than for high school graduates (Muennig, 2007). If the dropout rate decreases by 50 percent nationally, Medicaid would save $7.3 billion annually. Other benefits associated with an increase in the number of people with a high school diploma would be improved productivity and better health, resulting in $12 billion in heart disease savings, $11.9 billion in obesity-related savings, $6.4 billion in alcoholism-related savings, and $8.9 billion in smoking-related savings (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2018).

- A growing income gap may aggravate dropout rates, as low-income youth who view middle-class life as out of reach may already be deciding to invest less in their own economic futures (Kearney, 2016).

- The long-term anticipated economic costs associated with students who have not or will not earn a high school diploma from 2011 to 2021 is about $1.5 trillion. (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011).

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YEARLY LOSS OF
$36 BILLION
Annually, those who have dropped out of school pay about 58 percent less in federal and state income taxes

2

Societal Costs

Economic instability can exacerbate health and social stress, have a negative impact on families and, by extension, their communities (Rennie Center, 2012). Because low socioeconomic status is so closely linked with a variety of negative social outcomes, the dropout crisis is one of social importance. For example, research has found that:

- Students who have dropped out of school are more likely to engage in ongoing high-risk behavior than their graduate counterparts, creating a self-replicating pattern, such as teen pregnancy, delinquency, crime, violence, substance abuse, etc. (Woods, 1995; Hansell, 2016).

- Incarceration rates among people between the ages of 16 and 24 who have dropped out of school may be 63 times higher than among college graduates (Sun, 2009).

- About 67 percent of state prison inmates, 56 percent of federal prison inmates, and 69 percent of local jail inmates left school before earning a diploma (Alliance for Education Excellence, 2018). It costs, on average, $28,323 a year to house an inmate; more than twice than it costs to educate a student (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2018).

- Increased educational attainment could impact the nation's murder rate by 30 percent and nonviolent crimes by up to 20 percent (Lochner, 2004). If the high school graduation rate among males was to increase by just five percent, the U.S. could save $18.5 billion in annual crime costs. Such an increase would be associated with a decrease of 60,000 assaults, 37,000 cases of larceny, 31,000 car thefts, and 17,000 burglaries. This rate of high school graduation increase would prevent 1,300 murders, more than 3,800 rapes, and 1,500 robberies (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2018).

- The direct state and local government gains per each high school graduate, manifested in earning, health, crime, welfare and productivity in 2014 in Florida was estimated at $57,000-$63,000. The fiscal impact on federal spending in the state was estimated at $59,000-$89,000, with the full fiscal gain per high school graduate culminating in $116,000-$152,000 (Belfield, 2014).

63 TIMES HIGHER

Incarceration rates among people between the ages of 16 and 24 who have dropped out of school may be 63 times higher than among college graduates

3
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DROPOUT RISK FACTORS

Universally, literature on dropout prevention and recovery cites the complexity of dropout risk factors as a major barrier in effective intervention. Put simply, no two students may drop out for the same set of reasons, and the effective recovery of the student is highly dependent on the provision of a program tailored to each student's unique situation, addressing both academic and social factors (Princiotta, 2009; Lee, 2003.)

Recent studies show that some of the most powerful motivators for dropping out include a student's socioeconomic status; having a learning or physical disability; academic struggles manifesting in a lack of credits and poor grades; and self-identified factors such as a lack of interest in a class, a lack of challenge, a lack of engagement with school, alienation from peers and adults, a lack of parent involvement in education, a lack of interest on the part of teachers, and the feeling of not fitting into the school or classroom (Lynch, 2015 ; NCES, 2015; Martinez, 2015; Burrus and Roberts, 2012).

Together, these research efforts confirm that dropping out of school is not a sudden event but rather a long process of disengagement coupled with triggering events such as behavioral episodes, teen pregnancy, personal or family illness, or changes in a family's economic plight (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2011). Pregnancy is considered the prime reason for dropping out among female students (Shuger, 2012; Hansell, 2016). Nationally, 34 percent of students who become pregnant drop out; this percentage is even higher for minorities (Perper, 2010; Hansell, 2016). Dropout rates among students with learning or physical disabilities range from 25 to 36 percent (Snyder, 2019).

A conventional belief that students who leave school before earning a diploma are mostly from low economic backgrounds with a history of academic failure persists despite decades of research demonstrating otherwise. For example, using data from the 1998-2000 National Educational Longitudinal Study, one research study found that 40 percent of students in the lowest socioeconomic group will drop out, but so will 10 percent of students from the highest two socioeconomic groups (Almeida, 2006). Still, according to recent research, students from low income families are 2.4 times more likely to drop out than students from middle-income families and more than 10 times more likely than students from high income families (Lynch, 2015). Further, according to the seminal report, The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts, academic failure was only the fifth reason most frequently given for dropping out and was true for less than one-third of the dropout population (Bridgeland, 2006).

Significant dropout risk factors can be classified into four domains: individual, family, school and community (Hammond, 2007) or more broadly into two general categories: School/Academic Factors and Personal/Social Factors. The following table illustrates some of the most commonly cited risk factors in each category.

COMMON DROPOUT RISK FACTORS

SCHOOL-RELATED FACTORS	PERSONAL/SOCIAL FACTORS
• Loss of interest/low engagement in school/lack of motivation (America's Promise Alliance, 2015; Verma, 2015; NCES, 2015; Burrus, 2012; Hammond, 2007; Bridgeland, 2006; Woods, 1995, Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006)	• The need to work, support family (America's Promise Alliance, 2015; Scott, 2015; Verma, 2015; NCES, 2015; Vallett, 2011; Martin, 2006; Hammond, 2007; Woods, 1995)
• Too much academic pressure (Verma, 2015; NCES, 2015; Burrus and Roberts, 2012)	• Pregnancy/childcare/caregiving (America's Promise Alliance, 2015; Hammond, 2007; Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006)
• Lack of credits/poor academic performance (Burrus, 2012; NCES, 2015; Vallett, 2011; Bridgeland, 2006; Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006; New York City Department of Education, 2006)	• Delinquency/Legal issues (Verma, 2015; Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006; National League of Cities, 2007; Harris, 2006
• Significant absenteeism (Burrus, 2012; Bridgeland, 2006)	• Learning disability or emotional disturbance (Hammond, 2007)
• Grade Retention (America's Promise Alliance, 2015)	• Physical, mental health, medical issues (America's Promise Alliance, 2015; Vallett, 2011)
• Interaction with peers who did not value school, who dropped out (NCES, 2015; Bridgeland, 2006)	• Substance abuse issues (America's Promise Alliance, 2015; Vallett 2011; Woods, 1995)
• Too much freedom/too few rules (Bridgeland, 2006)	• Lack of family support (America's Promise Alliance, 2015; Burrus, 2012; Vallett, 2011; Woods, 1995)
• Academic failure (America's Promise Alliance 2015; Verma, 2015; Bridgeland, 2006; Woods, 1995)	• Low education level of parents (Hammond, 2007)
• Low expectations on the part of adults (Burrus, 2012; Hammond, 2007)	• Lack of family engagement in education (Hammond, 2007)
• Not fitting in (Verma, 2015)	• High family mobility (Hammond, 2007)
• Suspended or expelled (NCES, 2015)	• Siblings who dropped out (Hammond, 2007)
• Language deficiencies (Steinberg, 2004; Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006; Martin, 2006)	• Unstable living arrangements (Vellett, 2011)
• The feeling that no one at school cares (America's Promise Alliance, 2015; Martinez, 2015; Burrus, 2012; Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006)	• Foster care (Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006; National League of Cities, 2007)
• Fearing for safety/bullying (America's Promise Alliance, 2015; Verma, 2015; Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006)	• Migrancy (Cranston-Gingras, 2003)
	• Gang membership (America's Promise Alliance, 2015; Hammond, 2007)

Complicating the process of identifying specific dropout risk factors and targeting them for intervention, individual factors are often part of larger, complex cause-effect chains. For example, a student may lose interest in school, causing them to engage with a negative peer group, leading to the abuse of drugs and alcohol, causing a significant absenteeism problem. While early intervention and effective remediation of these risk factors is critical, it is just as important to consider all of the confounding factors and to assess the originating risk factor or factors (Stern, 1986).

Research addressing the likelihood of post-dropout re-engagement has been focused on demographics, length of being out of school, and grade level at drop out. Female students are more likely to return to school than male students, while white students are more likely to return than Black and Hispanic students (Martinez, 2015). The probability of disengaged students returning to school also varied with the length of time they were out of school. As the duration of being out of school increased, the likelihood of returning to school decreased (Martinez, 2015).

Female students are more likely to return to school than male students, while white students are more likely to return than Black and Hispanic students.

4

BARRIERS TO DROPOUT RECOVERY

There is a promising trend in dropout re-enrollment. A majority of students who drop out of school express a desire to get a high school diploma or alternative credentials. According to a 2009 America's Promise Alliance report, nearly one-third of those ages 18 through 24 who dropped out were not in the labor force or re-enrolled in an education program (Balfanz, 2009); about two-thirds of individuals who leave high school without a diploma eventually acquire a diploma or a GED (Schaffhauser, 2016).

While a great deal of research exists relative to the factors that cause a student to drop out, there is scant research on what motivates them to return to school. Personal barriers students face in re-enrolling are rarely addressed in reports on dropout recovery, however, one report (Wilkins, 2011) lists the following personal barriers to re-enrollment:

- Student poverty and cost of program
- Personal problems such as unstable relationships, drug abuse, mental health issues
- Low motivation and perseverance skills
- Lack of confidence and support networks
- Unfamiliarity with the culture of education
- Low literacy levels
- Lack of vehicle or public transportation
- Child care responsibilities

- Employment and other time conflicts
- Lack of awareness of the dropout recovery program

There is a lack of a systemic approach to dropout recovery, as manifested in system and program barriers to enrolling individuals in dropout recovery programs. According to the NGA Center for Best Practices (2011) these include:

- Difficulties in identifying and locating students who have left before earning a diploma
- Staffing and time constraints on the part of traditional programs to identify, contact and encourage students to re-enroll
- Limitations, such as lack of space and staff, for service and support
- Absence of non-traditional dropout recovery programs
- Lack or insufficient funding to serve and support recovered students

Public education reforms seeking to reduce the dropout rate have long been focused on dropout prevention and not on dropout recovery. Consequently, dropout recovery programs are not yet common. Dropout recovery is characterized by fragmentation, long-term underinvestment, and lack of appropriate visibility and prioritization from policy discussions and decisions (Rennie Center, 2012).

Public education reforms seeking to reduce the dropout rate have long been focused on dropout prevention and not on dropout recovery.

5

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES
IN DROPOUT RECOVERY

Research on the aspects of dropout recovery that are critical to actual student success has also been limited, although that has begun to change in recent years. Since data on individuals who enter dropout recovery programs is not routinely collected, there is little longitudinal tracking of and systematic information on which type of programs are most effective for graduating students with a diploma. There is also little evidence as to the extent to which the skills and credentials these students have acquired are associated with post-completion outcomes. Instead, most of the literature is limited to describing the type of program and providing information on the credentials and related experiences offered (Wilkins, 2011). For example, Pennsylvania's successful dropout recovery program models (Operation Restart, 2008) have the following characteristics:

- Offer academic supports in math and literacy to increase students' skills to an age-appropriate level
- Offer a rigorous and relevant academic program, involving real-world content and employment skills for current occupations
- Have connections to post-secondary education and workplace training
- Include opportunities for rapid credit recovery and accumulation, including getting competency-based secondary and post-secondary credits

- Are implemented in traditional and non-traditional settings, hours, and through a range of technologies to meet the diverse needs of these specific students
- Provide a comprehensive set of individualized and flexible support services including access to caring adult mentors and counselors

Over the past decade, however, there has been growing recognition that successful re-engagement of students who dropped out of school requires cross-system collaboration among community-based organizations, higher education, employment and public health (Hansell, 2016). This has led to growing interest and collaboration on the part of states, school districts, community colleges and non-profit and community-based organizations in dropout recovery (Wilkins, 2011). Still, only a small segment of the literature addresses dropout recovery.

A majority of dropout recovery research still tends to be based on anecdotal — rather than scientific — evidence of effectiveness. In addition, most dropout recovery research tends to focus on overall success, and does not delineate, for example, specific strategies within a particular successful program that may or may not have had a significant impact on the program's overall success. However, there has been a growing recognition, through research and practice, of the critical elements of an effective dropout recovery program.

The analysis of dropout recovery research and the review of state dropout recovery strategies reveal specific activities and strategies associated with successful programs that are highlighted again and again.

The analysis of dropout recovery research and the review of state dropout recovery strategies reveal specific activities and strategies associated with successful programs that are highlighted again and again. For example, the Texas Dropout Recovery Pilot Program that took place between 2008 and 2011 included 45 grantee programs. The programs were highly student-focused programs, meeting individual student needs; instructional and support services were delivered in a variety of ways including direct instruction, online instruction, test preparation, tutoring and mentoring; support services were provided including child care, counseling, transportation; and the programs offered flexibility regarding hours, locations, and length of time for completing program (Arroyo, 2011).

Furthermore, a few studies have emerged that have been able to pinpoint, using statistical modeling methodology, the contribution of individual strategies to the overall success of the program and quantitatively differentiate degrees of program success, thereby identifying the top-performing programs. The evaluation of the Texas Dropout Recovery Pilot Program that took place between 2008 and 2011 is among the more statistically robust studies (Arroyo, 2011).

The activities and strategies associated with dropout recovery programs generally fall under five broad categories: Program Management and Administration; Identification and Recruitment; Academic; Post-Secondary Advancement and Support; and Coaching/Mentoring.

1

Program Management and Administration

While research indicates that there are a number of successful practices associated with the management and administration of dropout recovery programs, this area also represents the greatest challenge. Developing and administering an effective dropout recovery program is highly challenging. The challenges include motivating students who struggled in traditional classrooms, customizing the program to meet a variety of learner needs, offering greater flexibility, and giving administrators and teachers the methods and tools they need to redesign the learning environment.

One survey of recovered students, for example, defined an effective dropout recovery program as having the following attributes: helping students keep from falling behind because of being absent or struggling academically; having a curriculum that focuses on what they need to learn; integrating their life experiences into the learning process; and having access to one-on-one help and support (CuroGens Learning, 2017).

Most of the available research in this area addresses challenges relating to program funding, location, staff, and program monitoring/evaluation.

Funding

Graduation Alliance's cost model bases fees on student enrollment, virtually eliminating unanticipated funding changes and ensuring that a consistent and comprehensive suite of services is available to districts of any size. By basing its cost structure on a predictable benchmark, Graduation Alliance is able to offer districts a complete program with little financial risk.

Program Location & Technology

The location of programs outside of traditional school walls is beneficial for several reasons. First, when simply getting to school is a challenge for students (e.g., in rural areas or when traditional school hours conflict with work requirements), having "anytime, anywhere" access to academic instruction can be an effective solution (Harris, 2006; Woods, 1995). In addition, often school capacity can be a stumbling block for effective alternative education programs — implementing instruction off campus can allow programs to accommodate more students (Hoye, 2005).

Locating programs outside of the school can also help students overcome strong negative associations they may have with the high school experience (Stern, 1986; Deyé, 2011). For example, services offered in an Oregon school district purposely located the program off campus because students were unwilling to attend workshops or receive services in the high school — even if such services did not require their full-time attendance at the school (Knepper, 1998).

In more recent years, community colleges and state agencies have partnered with education service providers to establish and administer dropout recovery programs, especially to serve older adults without a high school diploma. A growing range of reentry options and locations is currently available to students who dropped out. Some of these options are located outside the traditional public

school and may include online programs, night programs, adult education programs, alternative programs for youth with specific needs, community colleges, programs offering both a diploma and vocational preparation, dual enrollment high school/college programs, and programs combining the earning of a diploma with paid work experience (Wilkins, 2011).

Research suggests that the use of technology is an effective strategy for re-engaging students without having them return to the physical school location. Technology tends to be inherently motivational to students — it is a "youth friendly" option (Harris, 2006). Students at risk of dropping out and those who dropped out have inconsistent learning styles or their learning does not follow the linear learning path used in traditional programs, therefore, they do not fully benefit from a traditional curriculum and learning environment. A technology-based curriculum that adapts to the student's learning style, existing level of knowledge, and cognitive pace promotes retention, and enhances and accelerates learning. It also reinforces a positive attitude to learning (CuroGens Learning, 2017).

Technology affords remote access to instruction and communication — a benefit that is particularly important to students who have negative perceptions of or simply feel out of place in traditional high schools, (Cranston-Gingras, 2003; American Youth Policy Forum, 2006). In addition to the flexibility that technology provides it allows

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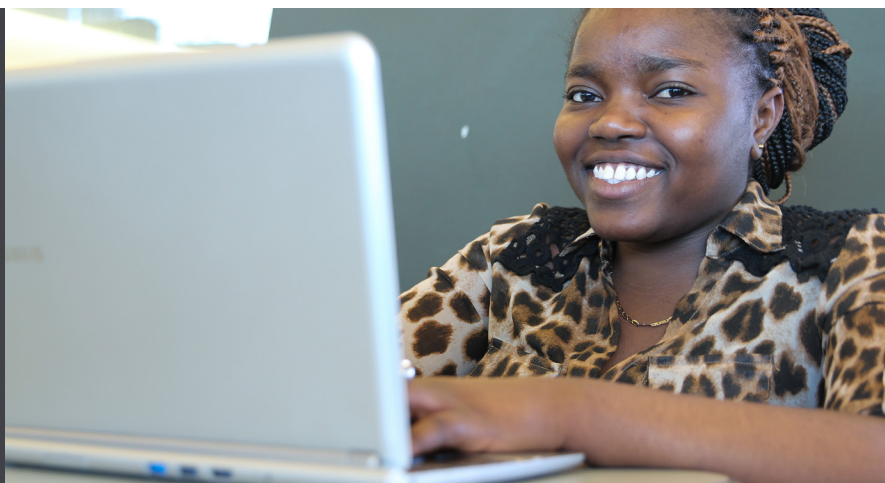
avoidance of age restriction rules that do not allow re-entry (Wilkins, 2011). Technology also provides an important and flexible option for students who are work-bound or home-bound, for example due to parenting responsibilities (Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006). Finally, technology represents an effective way to stay in touch with students who may be highly mobile — such as migrant students (Cranston-Gingras, 2003; Choy, 2018).

One of the hallmarks of Graduation Alliance's approach to dropout recovery is its use of technology to deliver both instruction and support via a laptop that includes program-provided 4G wireless connectivity. Thus, students have access to "anytime/anywhere learning," and can complete courses at a pace and schedule that works within their lives. In addition, Graduation Alliance students have access via email, phone, instant messenger, and the program's learning management system to instructors, academic coaches, and local advocates, as well as 24/7 tutoring.

Program Staff

Research also indicates that the qualifications and attitudes of staff providing dropout recovery services and instruction are critical for the retention of students in the program. The re-engagement of a student who has dropped out is a complex and challenging process but is crucial to their success in the program (Stout, 2009). Having a strong and committed staff is a core building stone of a successful dropout recovery program (Arroyo, 2011). In particular, staff must:

• Be equipped, at both the teacher and administrator level, with pedagogical methods and tools to redesign the learning environment to meet student needs (CuroGens Learning, 2017)

• Have sound advanced academic credentials, certifications and prior experience working with dropout recovery programs (Arroyo, 2011)

• Participate by choice in the program. Programs that constitute a "dumping ground" for unqualified, unmotivated staff can further alienate students from the educational setting (Aron, 2006; Woods, 1995)

• Play a role in designing the program they are implementing to increase educator buy-in (Aron, 2006)

• Comprise teachers who assume the caring and supportive roles of mentors and coaches, thus creating a non-threatening learning environment (Martin, 2006)

• Maintain a low teacher-student ratio to facilitate student engagement and interactions (Lembeck, 2013)

• Receive ongoing, high-quality professional development — both in instructional pedagogy and in dropout recovery and at-risk youth issues (Arroyo, 2011; Aron, 2006; NCYCDE, 2006; Harris, 2006)

• Receive frequent formal and information feedback and evaluation to ensure continued growth and effectiveness (Woods, 1995)

• Continuously monitor students' academic performance and progress, and respond in a timely manner to students' needs to ensure that students stay on track. (Martinez, 2015)

• Graduation Alliance emphasizes both professional qualifications and temperament in all staff members who work with students. Its comprehensive staff interview process focuses on identifying positive motivations for working with the dropout population. Those who hire for positions at Graduation Alliance look for experiences or activities that corroborate these motivations. For example, staff members may have dropped out of school themselves or have specific motivations to reach highly at-risk students. Staff members may also have a keen interest and involvement in community and charity activities.

In addition to careful screening to ensure that staff members have the desire necessary to work with this highly at-risk population, each Graduation Alliance staff member must demonstrate professional qualifications and must participate in regular formal and informal staff development. For example, staff members:

- Receive in-depth orientation training focusing on their specific areas of student support
- Participate in staff meetings at least monthly
- Take part in periodic review/discussions of "best practice" in dropout recovery

Graduation Alliance also emphasizes that clear, consistent, open, and timely performance feedback is critical to improving the quality of its staff and the program, and, ultimately, to improving student outcomes and parent/student satisfaction. Instructional coaches conduct a comprehensive review of each teacher's student feedback, grading and engagement. Further, the Graduation Alliance principal conducts a formative performance review with each instructor every six months, and an official, summative performance review is conducted once each year. Academic coaches and local advocates receive formal performance evaluations yearly. In addition, all staff members are evaluated based on student performance.

Program Monitoring and Evaluation

In light of the dearth of data on dropout recovery and the limited, and largely informal monitoring and evaluation of dropout recovery programs, states have become increasingly aware of the need to formally address dropout recovery as an essential part of dropout prevention. States like Texas require districts with high dropout rates to develop an annual dropout recovery plan as part of their dropout prevention plan. The plan, based on a needs assessment, must include a MOU with a public junior college to provide a dropout recovery program for the district's students. The needs assessment asks the district to specify its process for recovering students who have dropped out, an annual evaluation of its dropout recovery program, and the monitoring and evaluation systems it has in place to ensure adherence to the procedures outlined in its plan at the campus level (Texas Education Authority, 2018).

Effective programs use comprehensive data to assess students' status and overall program effectiveness at regular intervals and to make course corrections as needed. Yet, many schools and districts lack the resources to engage in the level and intensity of data collection and analysis needed to make well-informed program decisions (Aron, 2006). Often, dropout recovery and other "second chance" programs are held up to much less scrutiny than regular school programs.

Research also indicates that the qualifications and attitudes of staff providing dropout recovery services and instruction are critical for the retention of students in the program.

Yet, some researchers argue, programs serving students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out must be held to at least the same standard of data collection and close monitoring as regular school programs (Hoye, 2005). As data are not systematically collected on recovered students while in the program and following program completion, there is little information to identify effective strategies and programs or determine the extent to which acquired skills and credentials have led to positive outcomes (Wilkins, 2011).

Recent state trends are reversing this pattern. For example, Ohio's Department of Education requires that its dropout and recovery programs with students 16 to 22 years old, mostly served through community schools, test students and measure their academic progress to ensure they meet the same requirements as students in traditional public schools (Ohio Dropout Prevention and Recovery). In 2017, the Ohio Superintendent's Workgroup on Dropout Prevention and Recovery recommended that policies should "maintain high expectations for students… and include a focus on both workforce and college readiness" and that schools should be held accountable, in addition to academic performance metrics, to metrics aligned with student engagement, such as persistence in attendance, course progress, progress toward academic credits, and industry certifications and credentials.

In other cases, schools and districts may simply lack "good" data. Their data may be limited to student academic performance and broad demographic information. However, as previously stated, students drop out for a host of interconnected reasons, and failing to consider data about the "whole child" can dilute a program's effectiveness (National League of Cities, 2007).

Graduation Alliance uses a comprehensive data collection system that incorporates data on a variety of student factors. During the Enrollment Phase, recruiters record data specific to students' reasons for dropping out of school, available

family supports, and special circumstances (e.g., teen pregnancy/parenting, foster care, substance abuse, migrancy, etc.). These data are used to craft a tailored program providing specific supports to the student, and to inform general program implementation decisions. As a student progresses through the academic portion of the program, academic performance data (including time on task) is available at any time. In addition, students are held to district diploma standards, including state assessments, and student performance in relation to these standards is an important part of any review of individual student and overall program effectiveness.

Graduation Alliance's academic management team meets weekly to review feedback from academic coaches, local advocates, instructors, and district partners. Additionally, managers facilitate weekly meetings with the student recruitment team and program managers to ensure communication and feedback is flowing between the two groups. Every six to eight weeks, the Graduation Alliance executive team provides to the Board of Directors data on recruitment and retention, credit attainment, program spending, among other metrics. These data are also used to make minor program adjustments.

2

Student Identification and Recruitment

One significant challenge to identifying and tracking disengaged students is a lack of information on who has dropped out, and their post-dropping out location. Schools and districts often contend with outdated or inaccurate contact information, challenges associated with segments of the dropout population that may be particularly difficult to locate, and the negative associations these students and their families may have with school (NGA, 2011). For these and other reasons, in many cases even effective dropout recovery

programs fail to recruit enough students to fill the available slots (Bloom, 2010).

Recruitment through Multiple Channels

Research indicates that effective programs tend to recruit students through multiple channels. Letting disengaged students know about the different options available to them for getting a high school diploma has been the core of a city-wide initiative that Minneapolis implemented in September 2010, with the purpose of reaching 2,000 middle and high school students who dropped out. The large-scale "We Want You Back" campaign involved adult and teen volunteers who went door-to-door canvassing and sending text messages (Minneapolis "We Want You Back" Initiative, 2010). Delaware County in Pennsylvania organized a "Summit for Community Action – Re-Engaging Delaware County's High School Dropouts" in October 2010 bringing together all stakeholders, including youth, families, educators, service providers, and businesses to address the high dropout rate in the county and discuss best practices and strategies for re-engaging students. The summit emphasized the economic benefits to the students and to the county for re-engaging 3,700 disengaged students. It also estimated a savings to the county of $2.4 million a year and more than $35 million in additional tax revenue (Re-Engaging Delaware County Dropouts, 2010). Programs have used information strategies including advertising in newspapers, radio, cable TV, and hosting resource fairs (Wilkins, 2011).

In recruiting disengaged students, research indicates that having a good "referral system" that might involve, for example, peer-to-peer outreach or outreach through community-based organizations, is critical (Hoye, 2005; Harris 2006). In addition, communication content and methods should be geared toward attracting young people (Harris, 2006; Bloom, 2010). The most effective Texas dropout recovery programs that participated in a 2008-2011 pilot, in terms of the number of

students who earned a high school diploma, recruited aggressively using multi-pronged strategies including having recruiters on staff, allowing students to enter the program at any time, and overcoming any implementation barriers (Arroyo, 2011).

A dropout recovery program in a Texas school district utilizes a "leaver team" that takes immediate action to track students who withdrew or dropped out. The leaver teams consist of the principal, assistance principals, counselors, special education coordinator, attendance clerk, and staff from central office. The leaver team meets every 10 days to review student withdrawal data. The team receives lists of students who did not finish school and team members go out into the community to find the students and contact them to inform them about dropout recovery programs the district offers. According to counselors, about half of the disengaged students ultimately re-enroll (Martinez, 2015).

For highly mobile populations (such as migrant students or students in foster care), the identification and recruitment process is particularly challenging and requires a great deal of staff and time (Cranston-Gingras 2003; Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006). One successful program that focused on recruiting migrant students employed a full-time outreach specialist as well as several "on-the-ground" recruiters. Recruiters relied heavily on migrant agencies and other community organizations to reach this highly mobile population (Cranston-Gingras, 2003).

Recruitment of out-of-school youth not only has to offer a range of options but must have the ability to offer access to these options immediately in order to keep recovered students interested in re-enrolling. Making re-enrollment an easy process is imperative. For instance, identifying and locating disengaged students can be facilitated by having an open entry/exit policy, establishing enrollment centers, or extending school hours to allow for

a flexible schedule and year-round learning (Steinberg, 2004). One study of programs assisting students in transition from high school also suggested that providing tangible and intangible incentives for joining a program may be a highly effective recruitment tool. This may include a financial or material incentive or the opportunity to provide community service (Bloom, 2010).

The Boston Public Schools' Re-engagement Center (REC) found that re-engaging out-of-school youth in going back to school is time-sensitive and, if access to options is not immediately available, motivation to enter a program wanes. Students' interest and motivation to enroll is typically short-lived and must be addressed within this window. To address this challenge, the Boston Re-engagement Center offers educational options that allow immediate access and engagement (Rennie Center, 2012). Similarly, Philadelphia's Re-Engagement Center, founded in 2008, provides one-stop information and placement services to students ages 15 to 21 and their families. The center provides transitional support to high school diploma programs and connects students to resources such as childcare and employment. The center has served more than 10,000 students between 2008 and 2012 (Rennie Center, 2012).

Graduation Alliance implements a consistent, clearly articulated, and comprehensive process for handling recruitment of students from start to finish. Each student enrollment specialist receives thorough training on effective recruitment strategies, and uses scripts customized to each phase of the recruitment process to ensure accuracy and consistency. Using a contact list of eligible students provided by the district, student enrollment team members begin with a series of phone calls to students and/or their families.

Additional recruitment strategies include:

• Use of a robust contact strategy to reach prospective students with various channels which include phone, text, email, and social media.

• Letters and postcards sent by Graduation Alliance on behalf of the school district.

• Meetings with community resource centers to introduce the program and ask for referrals.

• Postcards left with school district and community resource center staff to hand out to students and their families.

Graduation Alliance staff also emphasizes a very short timeframe between initial recruitment and follow-up. For students who are pre-approved by the district, enrollment counselors immediately complete the registration process and schedule students to meet with their local advocate. During this strong start meetup, the local advocate will complete enrollment, assign a laptop, and help the student to begin working on courses.

Students who are not on the "pre-approved list" are often referred to Graduation Alliance. These students require district eligibility verification, which typically only takes between 24 and 48 hours. Once the district has approved the student, Graduation Alliance staff follows up with the student.

Tailored Options

As previously stated, the reasons for dropping out are numerous and complex, involving both academic, economic, and social issues. Thus, in order to successfully recruit and retain students, dropout recovery programs must demonstrate that they have flexible, individualized and interactive approaches to learning (Legters, 2010) and a variety of options and strategies available to address the specific challenges and needs of each student (Hansell, 2016; Martinez, 2015; Arroyo Research Services, 2011; Rumberger, 1987; Hoye, 2005; Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006; National League of Cities, 2007). Small learning communities, flexible scheduling such as offering

evening hours, year-round education, self-paced learning, and portfolio projects are possible accommodations (Hansell, 2016; Wilkins, 2011; Arroyo, 2011) along with the opportunity to earn credit for work experience.

Overall, a more recent trend is the greater focus on individualized and supportive learning experiences with teachers and staff as mentors and advocates (Rennie Center, 2012). In some cases, programs that have demonstrated high levels of success allowed students to proceed at their own pace (Arroyo, 2011) and create differentiated "tracks" within the program based on the specific social needs of students—such as teen parenting, homelessness, drug abuse, mental health issues and nutrition (Martin & Halperin, 2006). The Utah State Office of Education, for example, allows diploma-granting adult education programs to count work experience, professional licenses, skills training certifications, and military experience toward graduation requirements (Wilkins, 2011).

A Texas school district tailored its academic and support services to offer an array of interventions with support and constant monitoring that created an academic pathway that best met students' needs. These services ensured students had various academic options that lead to graduation. For students who were at risk of dropping out, as well as those who had dropped out but had been recovered, the district offered unique academic options, leaver teams, and the development of an individualized academic plan for each student. The two dropout recovery centers, one for students 14-21 and the second for students 17-25, had satellite campuses throughout the district and offered flexible schedules and hours of attendance, online curriculum supplemented by direct instruction and alternative offline materials, as well as intensive individualized academic support from teachers (Martinez, 2015).

The Texas Education Agency Dropout Recovery Pilot Program (2008-2011) funded 45 dropout recovery programs that were highly student-focused and included schedules where students could attend during the day, in the evening, or pursue flexible hours. Students could advance at their own pace and have a range of academic support such as tutoring and mentoring; social supports such as case management, child care, parenting education; and job training. The provision of social supports was essential because a majority (70 percent) of the students were economically disadvantaged (Arroyo, 2011). The degree to which the program was tailored to individual needs, regardless of the student's background characteristics, enhanced the program's effectiveness and successful outcomes, as measured by the number of students who completed a high school diploma. Programs that produced the largest number of graduates were also highly effective at working with students from different backgrounds.

Promising dropout recovery programs address the unique needs of these students and share common practices not found in traditional schools.

Promising dropout recovery programs address the unique needs of these students and share common practices not found in traditional schools. These programs focus on students' futures after high school by partnering with youth employment and workforce preparation programs and community colleges. The academics these programs offer are individualized and include year-round learning, flexible schedules, open access and exit, accelerated academics, and credit recovery. Their support services are tailored to student needs and involve case management. The programs have extensive support and wraparound services through partnership with community organizations such as agencies, healthcare providers, and community colleges (Rennie Center, 2012).

In New York City, a portfolio of options tailored to students' academic and social needs has been particularly effective in re-engaging over-age, under-credited youth—a significant portion of NYC's dropout population (New York City Department of Education, 2006). And at an Austin, Texas, dropout recovery program, an Impact Team was assigned to tailor intervention programs for all Austin campuses. Eighty percent of the interventions resulted in improvements in student discipline, attendance, and grades (Chmelynski, 2006).

Personal choice is also a key ingredient in motivating students to return to school, and offering a variety of options and supports can help students buy into the program. Students must feel they have a choice in how they attain their high school diploma. This requires the availability of many options, and for students to think about what they want for the future and what will work for them in terms of attaining an education (Hoye, 2005).

As previously described, the technology used to deliver Graduation Alliance's program affords significant flexibility. Courses are broken into manageable daily and weekly goals, and students generally work through each course within one month. However, as long as students are maintaining the agreed-upon pace of monthly course completion, they may work through more challenging courses, or electives of interest, at their own pace, based on a mutually agreed-upon student learning plan developed with the help of the student's academic coach. These plans can be modified based on life events or evolving interests. In addition, the provision of a personal academic coach and local advocate affords the highest level of program customization.

Case Management

Recent empirical evidence makes it imperative for dropout recovery programs to offer appropriate support services to students. Such support may include tutoring, career and college counseling, and individual graduation plans that the student and their academic coach should develop (Chappell, 2015). The coordination of these support services enhances their delivery.

Research has also suggested that successful programs must coordinate both academic and social supports (Arroyo Research Services, 2011; Woods, 1995; Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006; American Youth Policy Forum, 2006; Brush, 2002; Aron, 2006). Often, successful programs provide a "case management" approach (Arroyo Research Services, 2011) in which an individual or team is assigned to identify current academic and social barriers to graduation and to marshal appropriate academic and social resources.

It has long been established that if a suitable option is not available for a particular student, and there is no one in charge of creating one, students are less likely to enroll and persist in a dropout recovery program (Stern, 1986). This is particularly evident, as shown in recent analyses, in the case of students with special needs. Results of recent empirical studies support the establishment of special student recovery programs that offer

services that are especially tailored to the needs of these students including services that will help them obtain a high school diploma or equivalency certification (Chappell, 2015).

The ability to serve youth well depends greatly on the quality of the case management staff, and high-quality, sustained professional development is critical. For example, program staff interacting with students should be trained to identify and access local resources and social supports (Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006; Aron, 2006). However, in publicly funded programs it can be difficult to retain trained staff (Harris, 2006; Berliner, 2009).

Graduation Alliance's case management approach features a comprehensive intake process resulting in interventions tailored to each student's academic and social needs. During the intake interview, staff members determine specific academic and social needs, such as:

• Academic history

• Reasons for dropping out

• Current activities and time commitments (e.g., working, parenting, caring for a parent, etc.)

• Level of home support available

• Access to and comfort with technology

Enrollment counselors log student responses into Graduation Alliance's online system, the academic coach creates a customized student learning plan, and the local advocate works to address any social needs the student may have. Both the student's academic coach and local advocate stay with the student through successful completion of the program, ensuring the highest level of follow-up. Additional staff, including teachers, the Graduation Alliance principal, and other student services specialists provide ongoing support to the student based on cues from the academic coach and local advocate.

All Graduation Alliance staff members are rigorously trained to provide academic and social

support to students. Training encompasses theory and practice related to highly at-risk students, the process of creating and monitoring student programs, accessing community support services and resources for students, developing effective study habits, and implementing interventions when needed. In addition to comprehensive initial training in these areas, staff members attend regularly scheduled meetings to discuss promising and best practices in dropout recovery.

3

Academic Strategies

While academic failure is not the only factor that causes a student to drop out, it is nonetheless an important one. Research indicates that some of the most effective academic strategies include holding students to the same high standards as their peers in traditional schools; providing the opportunity to accrue missing credits very quickly and at times convenient to the student, and adapting the curriculum to the student's instructional level (Lembeck, 2013). This may also include the provision of low-literacy support (Hansell, 2016); providing high-quality curriculum and instructional support; remediating English language proficiency challenges; and incorporating technology. A 2008-2011 Texas dropout recovery pilot has shown that students with access to more academic services were more likely to advance grade levels and accrue more credits (Arroyo, 2011). This pilot also showed that the higher the student's last completed high school grade before dropping out, and the larger the number of state tests that student has passed while in high school, the greater the likelihood of earning a high school diploma.

Partnerships between community colleges and other organizations allow dropout recovery programs to not only offer credits toward a high

school diploma but also provide opportunities for those enrolled to gain employment skills, additional employment experience and credentials through affiliated job sites, and even enroll in dual high school/college courses (Wilkins, 2011).

Academic Rigor

A significant amount of research indicates that one of the key strategies in engaging/re-engaging students is the provision of an academic program based on very high standards and with strict codes of conduct (Bridgeland, 2006; Lee, 2003; Woods, 1995; New York City Department of Education, 2006; Bloom, 2010). Research had shown that consistently implemented codes of conduct are related to successful recovery initiatives (Martin, 2006). This may be an effective strategy, in part, because it helps to counteract the chaos that a student may have experienced in their home life or previous school experience (Bloom, 2010).

Further, it is critical that both teachers and students are keenly aware of the standards and of the consequences for failing to meet them (Aron, 2006; Martin, 2006). Some research indicates that requiring students and/or their parents to sign formal agreements to adhere to the standards— for both academic performance and student conduct— is an important step in ensuring the student and parent buy-in into the program (Chmelynski, 2006; Martin, 2006).

Traditionally, many dropout recovery programs have focused on helping students attain a GED, as opposed to a high school diploma. Yet, research has found that this pathway may not be desirable for students who have dropped out. In a study of two GED-focused dropout recovery programs in the Austin Independent School District, for example, the majority of students who entered the program dropped out of the program without receiving either a high school diploma or a GED. Researchers concluded that the estimated impact of these programs on the district's dropout rate was nominal (Wilkinson, 1994). In addition, students who earn a GED typically experience a significantly lower rate of college enrollment and persistence than their counterparts who receive a high school diploma (Heckman, 2011; Almeida, 2006; Tyler, 2005). There is also a danger that, once set on the GED attainment "track," students may be less likely to re-enroll in regular high school classes and continue on a trajectory toward post-secondary education (Hoye, 2005).

The Graduation Alliance program is designed not only to re-engage students who have left school, but to help them persist toward a high school diploma and beyond. Graduation Alliance holds students to very high standards of both academic performance and personal conduct. Upon enrollment in the program, students and their parents must read and sign the Student Honor Code, terms of use, and a student contract. These

> The Graduation Alliance program is designed not only to re-engage students who have left school, but to help them persist toward a high school diploma and beyond.

documents clearly outline both students' rights and responsibilities and describe the process for discipline based on failure to meet responsibilities. Students are given a 30-day notice if they have failed to make adequate monthly progress and are thus at risk of being removed from the program. They are provided counseling and planning to help them get back on track to complete the requisite courses. Student who do not make satisfactory progress for two consecutive months will be removed from the program. Students are eligible to apply for re-entry, at which time, pursuant to district agreements, the Graduation Alliance principal may evaluate the student's application, meet with them personally, and help reset and redefine student expectations.

Acceleration Opportunities

While there is a need to find a balance between a student's academic skills and pace (Lembeck, 2013), the ability to quickly accrue credits has been emphasized as a key motivator for students who enroll in dropout recovery programs. Many of these students feel overwhelmed at the possibility of having to repeat entire years of coursework in order to graduate. Allowing students to accelerate their learning can motivate them to re-enroll, especially for those who are over-age (Hansell, 2016; Deyé, 2011). For example, Philadelphia's Accelerated Schools, which served more than 2,100 students in 2010, provided an accelerated curriculum, individualized instruction, social services and career development (Rennie Center, 2012). New York City schools found this strategy particularly successful in recovering over-age, under-credited youth (New York City Department of Education, 2006).

In addition to making high school graduation seem like a realistic possibility for students who have dropped out, accelerated credit accrual provides the significant flexibility that is critical in getting these students back on track. Accelerated credit accrual enables students with competing time demands, such as work and parenting, to attend

school at their own pace with a schedule that aligns to their daily lives (Wilkins, 2011; Brush, 2002; Chmelynski, 2006; Deyé, 2011; Woods, 1995; Martin, 2006; Tyler, 2009). Among dropout recovery options, reentry programs have a low per-student cost (Wilkins, 2011).

The ability to recover credits quickly has been recognized as a major incentive for students to return to school (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2011). It is one of the most frequently cited successful strategies but can pose challenges for schools and districts. It may be challenging to identify and locate the students who dropped out. Student identification and recruitment may also require the hiring of additional personnel. When offering such programs within the walls of a school or other physical location, space may be limited and demand can exceed supply making it difficult to accommodate students (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2011).

In one study of previously disengaged students returning to school in a California school district, researchers found that while accelerated credit recovery was an effective strategy in both recruitment and persistence of students who have previously dropped out, more students requested enrollment in the district's credit recovery program than the district had the capacity to serve. Also, the district may not have adequate funding, or be able to offer a quality program for the recovered dropout, and its technology may be unreliable (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2011).

In addition, students may use multiple avenues to accrue credits, such as high schools, colleges and work-study programs. However, without a clearly articulated and carefully monitored graduation plan, these disparate efforts may not culminate in the correct number and distribution of credits needed to receive a high school diploma (Berliner, 2009). In a Texas district with an effective dropout recovery program, individualized academic plans keep students on track in credit recovery programs focused on completing the credits. Without a

plan, the likelihood of credit completion is low. An individualized academic plan, developed jointly by the counselor and student, not only identifies the credits students need to complete but also the best strategies for doing so, and the number of courses the student can handle at one time. Teachers' daily monitoring of student progress was also critical, as continuous monitoring of progress created accountability for students. Continuous monitoring also created a favorable experience for recovered students, different from their experience in the traditional high school (Martinez, 2015).

Graduation Alliance offers a variety of methods for accelerating student progress beyond what is possible in a fixed schedule classroom-based format without compromising the rigor or the courses or program. At its core, the program provides access to high school credit classes that will result in the attainment of a high school diploma. At the requisite rate of course completion, students complete work at a pace slightly faster than students at a typical public school with a 9-month calendar. However, Graduation Alliance students participate in the program 12 months a year and many who request to accelerate credit attainment are given permission and support as they demonstrate a capacity to do so. In addition, Graduation Alliance has the capacity to serve any number of students who meet eligibility requirements and wish to enroll in the program.

Upon request by a student, and approval by Graduation Alliance and district staff, Graduation Alliance offers some courses that allow students to earn credit for life experiences, such as work-study experience. Students who wish to participate in these experiences must register and complete the requirements of the associated course, including logging time spent on the activity, providing documentation of time spent, and meeting the minimum contact/supervisory conditions established in the course contract.

A Written Student Learning Plan is integrated into the online coursework and course management

system used by Graduation Alliance. Each student must have a completed learning plan prior to enrollment. The academic coach works with the student to create the plan, which includes all information necessary to guide student learning, including:

• A beginning and ending date

• A description of how weekly check-ins with the mentor of record will occur

• A list of all courses the student will be taking during the school year

• A list of all exams the student should take during the school year

The plan is carefully monitored by the student's academic coach, and deviations or delays in timely completion of the plan are remediated immediately.

Quality of Instruction

In addition to an academic program focused on maintaining high standards, research suggests that for students who have dropped out, providing academic content that is meaningful, interesting, and relevant is critical. Simply providing "more of the same" instruction as students had before dropping out is not effective. Specifically, learning experiences are most beneficial and motivational to recovered students when they are:

• Meaningful and applicable to a future career (Lembeck, 2013)

• Relevant to students' daily lives (Bridgeland, 2006)

• Grounded in "real-world" contexts (Bridgeland, 2006; Woods, 1995)

• Related to experiences from the world of work (Martin. 2006)

• Process oriented, not just content-oriented (Woods, 1995)

• Aligned to individual student passions as a way to motivate persistence (Hoye, 2005; Stern, 1986)

It is important to ensure the instructional methods and materials provided are standards-based—particularly when students will also have to pass graduation exams to earn their diplomas. Ensuring instructional materials are standards-based may be particularly important for students completing the program within juvenile justice facilities (Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006).

In addition to high-quality, motivational instructional materials, students must also have high quality certified teachers, access to one-on-one instruction, and frequent, personalized feedback in order to stay engaged in the academic content. Because many disengaged students had been "lost in the shuffle" at their previous schools, research indicates that a low student-to-teacher ratio, use of small learning groups, and other strategies that provide students faster and more direct access to instructional support are important to help students feel like their progress matters (Martinez, 2015; Aron, 2006; Woods, 1995; Steinberg, 2004).

Graduation Alliance ensures quality in its curriculum and instruction through multiple mechanisms. First, Graduation Alliance courses implement research-based instructional design and best practices for specific learning modalities. Learning objectives, including both mastery of principles and concepts and their application, are clearly defined for each organizational unit.

Courses use teacher-curated content requiring students to demonstrate both understanding of facts and critical thinking. Content is presented in instructionally effective, efficient, and authentic ways; students have the opportunity to demonstrate understanding of new material and to apply the concepts to unique and authentic situations, which promotes higher level critical thinking and provides evidence of learning outcomes. Ongoing research in best practices of online course design and implementation continuously informs the course design, development, review, and revision process for Graduation Alliance content.

Students also have access to third-party courses, in addition to courses created by Graduation Alliance. Third-party courses are evaluated against stringent criteria, including:

- Clear, logical, easily accessible course organization and structure

- Consistently presented, well-articulated lessons, including objectives, introduction and presentation of concepts, guided practice, application of concept, and assessment of understanding

- Authentic, challenging, and, where appropriate, interdisciplinary approaches to learning

- Adaptable, customizable pacing options

- Application of research-based eLearning design principles

- Provision of frequent opportunities for students to interact with the concepts and knowledge material, with other students, and with the teacher, forming the overall learning community

- Reliable, appropriately used learning and feedback tools

- Clearly articulated student requirements, rules, and expectations

- Audience-appropriate readability

- Content that has depth and richness, is accurate and current, is engaging, incorporates interactive simulations and multimedia presentations to reinforce concepts; and reflects the multicultural world in which students live

- Inclusion of web resources that are redundant and stable, are directly related to the content of the course, direct students to trustworthy sources, and guide students through appropriate use of the source

- Compliance with ADA section 508 accessibility requirements and best practices in online learning.

Graduation Alliance's core academic courses are fully aligned to state standards. This ensures that students receive the same high-quality instruction

as their peers in traditional high schools and that their mastery of course content will be evidenced in their ability to pass state assessments. Standards mappings are maintained with other Graduation Alliance documentation related to courses.

Students enrolled in Graduation Alliance's program have significant access to instructional support, both one-on-one and in small groups. For example:

- Instructors are required to conduct office hours/ tutorials a minimum of one hour per week per course. They must also answer students' individual questions via email or phone in a timely manner and are responsible for facilitating and monitoring student discussions within the online classroom.

- Each student has an academic coach who is responsible for monitoring student academic performance, addressing concerns, and answering students' academic questions via email, phone, instant message, or text message in a timely manner. Academic coaches monitor student progress and performance daily and coordinate proactive interventions when students' pace or progress starts falling off target.

- Students have 24/7, unlimited access to academic tutors. At any time and within any course, students can simply click a sidebar to be transported to the tutoring site, so instructional support is truly available at the point of need.

Assessment and Feedback

Holding students who have previously disengaged from school to the same high academic standards as their counterparts in traditional high schools is important. However, researchers have long warned that demanding increased academic performance without providing appropriate student-centered support is likely to result in a second dropout event (Hoye, 2005; Stern, 1986). To reduce the likelihood of academic failure, student academic performance must be closely monitored, and a rigorous "early warning system," including frequent academic assessment, and most importantly, timely and

sustained intervention, must be in place (Chappell, 2015; Bridgeland, 2006; Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006). In addition to assessing students frequent and remediating academic deficiencies, some research also emphasizes the importance of recognizing and rewarding student successes (Woods, 1995; Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006).

Graduation Alliance focuses on frequent assessment with timely follow up. For example:

- An intake assessment of reading and mathematics literacy to help determine grade level, courses and necessary interventions.

- Assessment opportunities are authentic and mapped to the learning outcomes.

- Opportunities for pre-assessment are provided (as appropriate).

- Self-checks with automated feedback are used frequently to help students and teachers gauge student acquisition of course content.

- Multiple approaches to assessment, including objective and subjective quizzes and exams, creative writing assignments, research papers, and group projects, are included in each course, creating an ideal balance of immediate feedback and critical thinking opportunities specific for that learning modality.

- For courses developed or enhanced by Graduation Alliance, course design is informed by the Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation (ADDIE) model for instructional design and development. The ADDIE model consists of the assessment of learner needs; a comprehensive design plan produced by the development team, including a subject-matter expert, instructional designer, and multimedia developers; development of high quality, relevant instructional content, including multimedia and simulations; implementation of the course in a pilot environment; and an ongoing evaluation and revision process.

- Courses are also informed by research-based eLearning design principles and best practices as well as the Quality Matters K-12 Online and Blended Learning Rubric.

On a daily basis, Graduation Alliance's staff members track students' pace (how quickly a student moves through a course), progress (how well a student performs on assessments), and attendance (tracked through logins). Instructors, academic coaches, and local advocates have access to a "dashboard" with tabs for pace, progress, and attendance.

At the first sign of a student missing or failing an assignment, the intervention process begins. First, Graduation Alliance staff determines the cause of the student's setback. For example, a student struggling with pace is often struggling with a life issue that is impacting the time they have available to complete coursework. If this is the case, the local advocate steps in to identify potential solutions and connect the student with the appropriate community resources. A student struggling with progress typically requires an intervention from the instructor, who may invite the student to a web meeting to walk through the material and re-teach a concept one-on-one, as needed. If a student is struggling with attendance, this triggers contacts from all staff members. In many cases, students simply need to know that their absences are noticed.

Confounding Academic Factors

Research also suggests that two confounding academic factors—Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and Special Education status—may play a significant role in the decision to drop out of school (Blackorby, 1996; Harvey, 2001; Zhang, 2006; Kortering, 2009; Cornell, 1995).

It can be difficult to obtain accurate data on students with disabilities enrolled in re-entry programs that serve young adults up to the age of 24 or 26 (Wilkins, 2011). While there is little research on specific strategies for promoting

academic persistence in Special Education students, some studies suggest that Special Education students may benefit significantly from:

- Greater "self-determination" in their educational experiences (Zhang, 2006; Kortering, 2009).

- Academic content grounded in real-life situations, incorporating a variety of interesting teaching techniques (i.e., avoiding the traditional teacher/lecturer model), and utilizing technology (Kortering, 2009; Kortering, 1999).

Teachers who are genuinely interested and demonstrably supportive of students' needs are an important ingredient in reaching Special Education students (Kortering, 1999).

- The creation of dropout recovery programs that offer specialized services to address the needs of students with disabilities and enable them to obtain a high school diploma or equivalency certifications (Chappell, 2015).

Graduation Alliance's curriculum, instructional content and practices emphasize the use of engaging, motivational, technology-rich learning. In addition, Graduation Alliance staff involves students directly in the development of their written student learning plans. An important component of this planning process is the review and coordination of a Special Education Student's Individualized Education Plans (IEP). Graduation Alliance staff receives each student's IEP from the school district and works with the district and the student to ensure an educational experience that addresses the student's academic needs and future plans. Special Education students benefit from routine, consistent communication with their instructors, academic coaches, and local advocates.

Additionally, many Special Education students benefit significantly from the very nature of Graduation Alliance's online classroom:

- Expectations are clearly delineated in writing
- Each course follows the same organizational structure

- Students can "pause," "rewind," and "repeat" a lesson presentation as often as needed

- Students can take extra time on assignments without the implicit peer pressure of students around them finishing earlier

- Students have unlimited access to academic tutors, 24x7x365

- Students can create their own learning environment that is most conducive to their learning needs. Students take a Learning Style Inventory and discuss the results and recommendations with their academic coach as one of their first activities in the program.

Research has found that if an underlying English language literacy problem exists, it must be addressed prior to, or alongside, the student's academic deficiencies (Woods, 1995; Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006). In one program, LEP support and tutoring for the migrant population—alongside academic instruction—was reported to be critical to the program's overall success (Cranston-Gingras, 2003).

Graduation Alliance works with the local district to provide level-appropriate programming to English Language Learners (ELL). Additionally, many of the courses offered by Graduation Alliance include the following ELL accommodations:

- Video lectures can be paused and replayed and closed captions or text transcripts, allowing students additional review time

- Staff members, including local advocates, academic coaches, and teachers who are bilingual (English/Spanish) are available to help students translate and interpret reading assignments and activity instructions, regardless of whether that staff member has direct responsibility for the student who is need of assistance

- Note pages are provided with most lessons to help students identify key concepts and terms and teachers provide final exam study guides

- Vocabulary terms are glossed in-line

4

Post-Secondary Advancement and Support

There is a growing recognition that the ultimate goal of dropout recovery cannot be restricted to helping students earn a high school diploma. The changing economy and the outsourcing of low skill jobs necessitate the acquisition of some post-secondary education and employment skills. This recognition has expanded the scope and partnering structure of many dropout recovery programs, as they are offering not only a high school diploma but also employment skills and certifications and college credits.

Research indicates that helping students envision a bright future and take appropriate steps toward that future is an important component to successfully recover students who have dropped out.

Research indicates that helping students envision a bright future and take appropriate steps toward that future is an important component to successfully recover students who have dropped out (Hansell, 2016; Knesting, 2008). A study of a dropout recovery program in San Antonio ISD, Texas, for instance, found that recovered student were motivated by the thought of going to college despite their difficult situations. After visiting colleges, dropout recovery students reiterated their motivation to stay in school to earn a diploma (Martinez, 2015).

Some programs emphasize workforce skills training, while others emphasize post-secondary advancement. Many programs also incorporate formal planning for the future. For example, one of the common practices that promising dropout recovery programs in Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and Portland, Oregon, share is a focus on students' future beyond high school. These programs partner with youth employment and workforce preparation organizations as well as with community colleges allowing them to integrate college-level courses (Rennie Center, 2012). Pennsylvania's successful dropout recovery program models emphasize connections to post-secondary education and workplace training and offer opportunities for rapid credit recovery and accumulation, including getting competency-based secondary and post-secondary credits (Operation Restart, 2008).

Programs that focus on preparing students for careers provide a variety of training and services. Some programs help students work toward a certificate in high-demand fields alongside regular coursework (Martin, 2006). For example, in New York City schools, community-based organizations provide services such as job training, career counseling, and job placement assistance (New York City Department of Education, 2006).

Research has shown that many students who have dropped out do pursue some form of post-secondary education. However, few persist long enough to attain a degree (Almeida, 2006). Some successful recovery programs work with local universities and colleges to allow students to earn college credit while completing high school work, so that students enter college with the skills and knowledge to make them "college ready" (Martin, 2006; Woods, 1995; Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006; Harris, 2006; American Youth Policy Forum, 2006). For example, the Gateways to College program in Portland, Oregon, enrolls students in combined high school and college courses after one semester of intensive academic instruction. An evaluation of the program found that more than 83 percent of students reached college-level reading proficiency and 70 percent successfully completed college preparation courses (Steinberg, 2004).

Some programs have found that while students often believe they have a bright future, with specific goals and aspirations, they have little sense of the specific steps needed to help them reach their goals (Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006). Thus, programs often incorporate the development of a "life plan" that identifies career or college goals and specific steps needed to attain those goals (Woods, 1995; Hoye, 2005; Cranston-Gingras, 2003).

Still, many students find that after they have completed their high school education, the transition to college or to the world of work is not an easy one, and positive program effects may diminish as students leave the structured environment of the program and are set "adrift" in the world of college or work (Bloom, 2010). Consequently, some programs emphasize additional support for post-program transition. One successful program employed a full-time "transition specialist." In addition to helping participants transition into post-secondary opportunities, the staff followed up with students to ensure that their plans were on track (Cranston-Gingras, 2003; Bloom, 2010).

All students participating in Graduation Alliance's program are required to develop a career exploration and planning process with the assistance of their academic coaches. The plan covers the student's high school experience and one year following graduation and is intended to help students begin thinking about their future and focusing on courses they need to best prepare them for their career interests, whether those interests lead to additional schooling or directly into a vocation. This includes assessments that align post-secondary goals with student aptitude and interest, assistance in identifying colleges and trade schools that can help a student meet those goals, help with school and scholarship applications, resume building workshops, job search and placement assistance, and social media networks to help connect graduates to educational and career opportunities.

Because students enrolled in Graduation Alliance are considered "diploma-seeking students" within their public-school districts, they generally have access to all of the district's established career and college counseling services, as well.

5

Coaching/Mentoring

Many research studies indicate that students' social "disconnect" from schools cannot be ignored in attempting to re-engage and sustain student participation in academic work. Student engagement is considered crucial to an effective dropout recovery program because student engagement leads to academic success and program completion (Stout , 2009). Coaching/mentoring appears to be an important component. Research indicates that coaching/mentoring
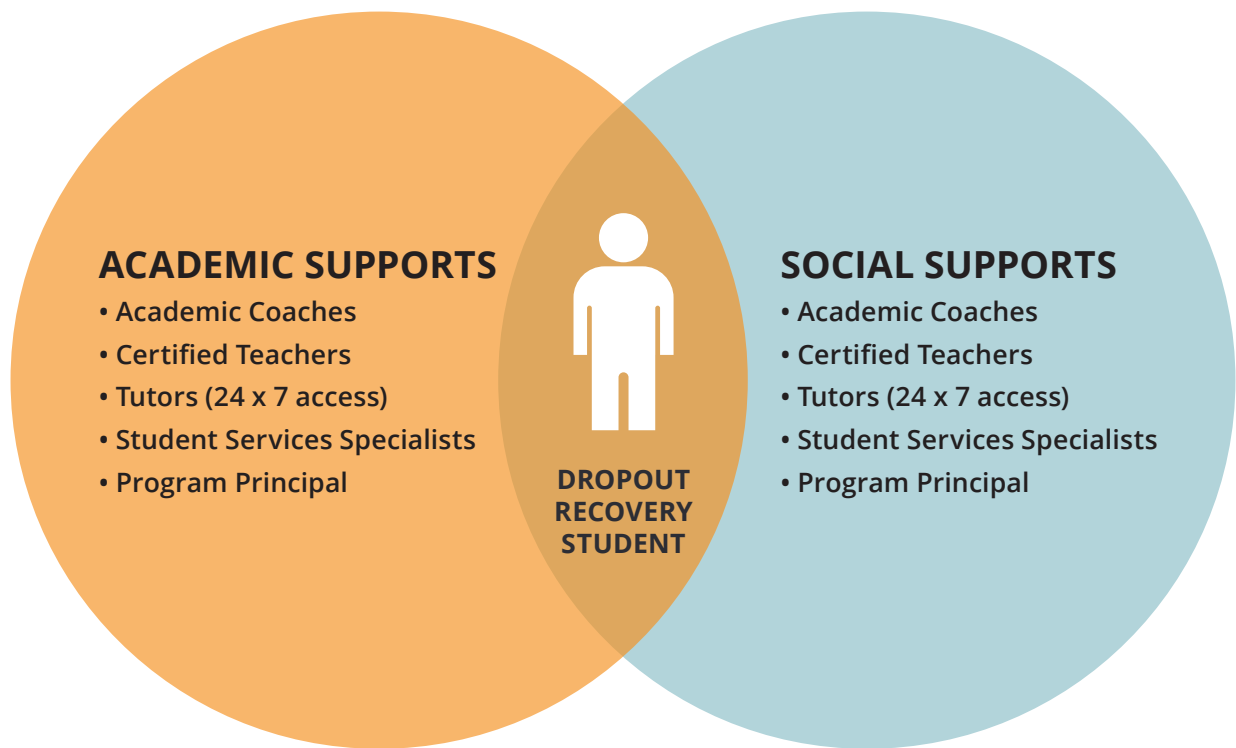
must address a variety of student needs: social/emotional, academic, and practical (Arroyo Research Services, 2011; Aron, 2006; Woods, 1995; Bloom, 2010).

Often, students have left school because of a social/emotional disconnect. Many programs focus on rebuilding students' trust and sense of belonging in school. Strategies to accomplish this may include a focus on developing exceptional teacher/student relationships (Lee, 2003; Martin, 2006; Knesting, 2008). Group mentoring can also be effective because it may bond students to the program as social bonds are formed (Stern, 1986; Steinberg, 2004; Martin, 2006; Hoye, 2005; Bloom, 2010).

Coaches and mentors are also important in keeping students "on task" academically. This may include simply knowing that a teacher believes in a student's ability to achieve. For example, in a study of students who had dropped out and re-enrolled in school, researchers found that a significant factor influencing students' persistence after re-enrolling was the support the student received from teachers who believed in them and wanted them to succeed (Knesting, 2008).

In some cases, the role of coach/mentor expands beyond the school walls to help students overcome barriers in their personal lives. Frequently, this includes helping students access social services, such as clothing, shelter, childcare, substance abuse support, etc. (Chmelynski, 2006; Hoye, 2005). Several programs also use a liaison to work with local law enforcement for students who are incarcerated or have a history of juvenile offenses, or with foster care systems (National League of Cities, 2007; Harris, 2006). However, school staff may lack the time or expertise to provide access to these services. Some programs partner with community-based organizations to provide access to social services (Chmelynski, 2006).

Graduation Alliance provides students with a comprehensive support network encompassing and supporting students' academic and social needs. This support network is facilitated through the use of technology and is summarized in the graphic below.

ACADEMIC SUPPORTS
- Academic Coaches
- Certified Teachers
- Tutors (24 x 7 access)
- Student Services Specialists
- Program Principal

DROPOUT RECOVERY STUDENT

SOCIAL SUPPORTS
- Academic Coaches
- Certified Teachers
- Tutors (24 x 7 access)
- Student Services Specialists
- Program Principal

Upon intake, students are asked a series of questions to determine the specific reasons they had for dropping out, life circumstances that might complicate their completion of high school, and the support mechanisms they may have available in their personal lives. Acting on this information, the student's academic coach creates a personalized student learning plan that, upon successful completion, will result in a high school diploma. Simultaneously, the local advocate identifies various supports needed to address the students' challenging life circumstances. Additionally, districts may choose to provide students with Graduation Alliance's ScholarCentric social-emotional learning assessments and interventions to better understand and address non-cognitive skill development.

While Graduation Alliance academic coaches and local advocates represent the "front line" in terms

of student coaching and monitoring, as students progress through the program, staff at any level may become involved in resolving a specific barrier to students' program completion. Communication between staff members is critical, and often a challenge or barrier requires input from multiple staff members. For example:

- If a student drops out or is removed from the program following a series of interventions, the student's academic coach and/or local advocate may work with the student to apply for re-entry.

- Students applying for re-entry must complete a set number of courses within the requisite course completion time to be formally re-enrolled.

- A teacher may identify a potentially challenging life issue as they are reviewing student work (e.g., if a student writes about a traumatic experience). The teacher alerts the local advocate, who

makes contact with the student to discuss the occurrence, and if necessary, connect the student with local support/counseling services to address the emotional effects of the experience.

- Academic coaches, acting as navigators, guide students through the educational experience. Academic coaches are responsible for monitoring the early warning system, identifying academic and social barriers, and coordinating interventions.

- Local advocates are responsible for coordinating social service interventions for students. As members of the communities in which their students reside, these advocates meet regularly face-to-face with students, build relationships of trust, and bring their knowledge of community resources to bear in the identification and mitigation of social barriers.

6

Fostering Parental Support

There is empirical evidence that family engagement has a large and significant impact on dropout rates. It has emerged as the most significant factor affecting student academic performance and behavior (Chappell, 2015). Research suggests that students are more successful in returning to and persisting in high school when parents are involved—talking about school and emphasizing their concern over school performance, watching for risk factors and seeking help when needed, and learning about the programs available to help their children (Philadelphia Youth Network, 2006; Hoye, 2005). However, many disengaged students lack a support system at home to help them stay focused on and succeed in school (Hoye, 2005). Some successful dropout recovery programs not only provide direct mentoring support to students, but also foster improved home support for students by increasing communication with parents (Bridgeland, 2006; Woods, 1995).

Graduation Alliance uses several approaches to foster improved parental support of students. Local advocates frequently invite parents to weekly meetups and regularly contact parents to discuss student progress. In areas with large Latino populations, where students may be fluent in English but their parents may not be, Graduation Alliance seeks to hire bilingual local advocates to build positive school-parent relationships and to help parents become more involved in students' academic activities. In addition, Graduation Alliance provides access to student data for parents (where allowed by FERPA) through the Parent Portal.

6

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CONCLUSION

Graduation Alliance's dropout recovery programs have demonstrated efficacy and an alignment to identify best practices, with results that number in many thousands of graduates across the nation.

There is no "magic" to this organization's programs. The reason Graduation Alliance has been able to produce such results is because its programs are sustainable from a funding perspective, have strong student identification and recruitment techniques, employ rigorous but personalized programming, and offer robust support. As a result, Graduation Alliance is a model best-practices organization for employing effective dropout recovery strategies.

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**What Does A Partnership With
Graduation Alliance Look Like?**

**The Dearborn Difference
Hear From Our Partner**

Dropout Recovery

Re-engage Students. Reclaim Funding. Increase Graduation Rate.

Data Driven
We provide a research-based approach to alternative education which is holistic in nature, pairing time and place flexibility with the multi-tiered supports that many at-risk and non-traditional students require in order to stay on track for graduation and successfully transition to life after high school.

Re-Engagement Experts
Our team has been re-engaging students who can't or won't go to school for 16 years. Using a multi-channel outreach strategy that includes data appending and social media marketing and profile matching. We find students and remove the barriers preventing them from achieving academic success.

Expansion Partnership
Our program enhances your current dropout recovery efforts with additional outreach, support, and graduation pathways, ensuring an additional safety net for students.

Individualized Student Support

Graduation Alliance

360° OF SUPPORT

STATE-CERTIFIED TEACHERS
Teachers are dedicated to helping students explore interests and master course concepts. Teachers offer weekly study sessions for one-on-one help.

ACADEMIC COACH
Coaches monitor student pace and progress to help them stay on track, build each students' education plan, and schedule their courses.

LOCAL ADVOCATE
Each advocate is familiar with the local community and hosts weekly academic and social meet-ups where students can work on homework, get help navigating life's challenges, and connect with other students in the program.
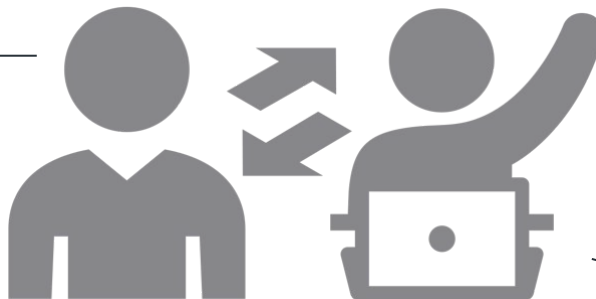
TUTORS
Virtual tutors are available 24/7 so students can get homework help any time of day or night!

IT SUPPORT
Students are supplied with an Google Chromebook and wifi hotspot for the duration of the program. They have access to full IT support on weekdays to help with computer and student portal questions.

Boost Enrollment. Reclaim Funding. Increase Grad Rate.

Graduation Alliance

HOW TO REFER A STUDENT

Securely identify students for outreach
Upload a list of **students who have stopped attending school** or **current students who'd be a good fit for the program** to our secure file-sharing site.

Enrollment team outreach
Graduation Alliance's enrollment team uses a multi-channel re-engagement strategy to reach out to students and parents to gauge their interest in the program, explain the enrollment process, and get them enrolled in the program.

District approval
When we connect with a student who wants to enroll but hasn't been referred directly to us with a pre-approval, we will email your district for approval through the Grad Ally portal.

Completion of enrollment
Once enrollment documents have been verified and the student is approved by your district, they finish their enrollment forms and receive their Grad Ally login information.

Activation
When the student completes all required enrollment steps, they become an active student. Your district will receive an enrollment notification via email.

80%+
District Referral Conversion

10%
List Conversion

Third-Party Validation

Accredited by Cognia
Index of Educational Quality: 374.69 out of 400 compared to a Cognia Institution Network five-year average of 278.34-283.33

Graduation Alliance is a certified Benefit Corporation and was acknowledged as one of the "Best for the World" in July 2021.

NCAA Eligibility Center

More than 25 of our core curriculum courses have been approved by the NCAA Eligibility Center.

Twenty-six of our career technical courses and first-year college course work have been recommended for college credit

All of courses scored **98-100%** of points possible from Quality Matters external evaluators.

Mission Measurement evaluated Graduation Alliance's dropout recovery programs in 2021 and found that we significantly outperformed the national benchmark for dropout recovery programs.

Mission Measurement

MISSION MEASUREMENT

Graduation Alliance's dropout recovery programs have significantly outperformed the national benchmark for dropout recovery programs established by the Impact Genome Project on both efficacy and cost per outcome, **providing 27% more outcomes for 33% less cost**, based on a 2021 study by Mission Measurement.
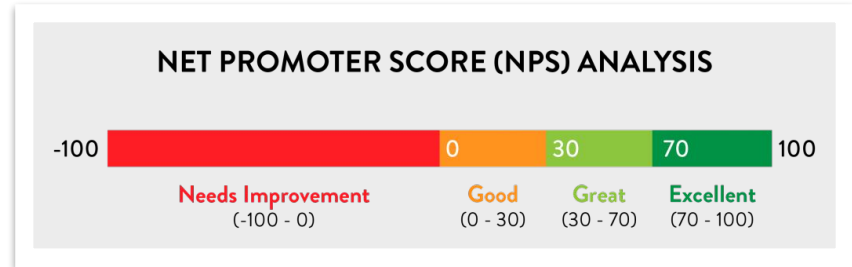
Summary of Findings*:

- Reach: **7,796 Students**

- Primary Outcome: **High School Completion**

- Number of Beneficiaries to Achieve Outcome: **3,616 Students**

- Overall Program Efficacy: **46%** *(compared to Impact Genome benchmark – 36%)*

- Overall Cost-Per-Outcome (CPO): **$8,423** *(compared to Impact Genome benchmark – $12,504)*

From October 2017–February 2020 Graduation Alliance Dropout Recovery Program achieved the following results

Efficacy and Cost-Per-Outcome by Credits Needed

Credits Needed at Entry	Efficacy	Cost-Per-Outcome
0 - 5	71%	$3,098
5.25 - 10	54%	$7,237
10.25 - 15	40%	$12,327
15+	26%	$17,368

Green data indicates efficacy & cost-per-outcome better than IGP national benchmark

Net Promoter Score (NPS)

Rankings translate to an overall score ranging -100 to 100

NET PROMOTER SCORE (NPS) ANALYSIS

-100   0   30   70   100

Needs Improvement (-100 - 0)   Good (0 - 30)   Great (30 - 70)   Excellent (70 - 100)

Graduation Alliance Statistics

★   NPS **81**

Net Promoter Score [NPS] = Measure of customer satisfaction and loyalty

Users rank on a scale of 0-10: "How likely are you to recommend this program to your friends or family?"

- 9-10 = Promoters
- 7-8 = Neutral
- 0-6 = Detractors

Arizona Dropout Recovery

- Eligible for districts to offer **students that have dropped out or are at-risk of dropping out**

- Students can receive funding for up to 12 months with each month equal to 1/12 FTE, July 1–June 30 annually.

- Maximum claim is 1.0 FTE maximum

- Students need to make satisfactory academic progress and have a learning plan

- Graduation Alliance is an approved vendor for dropout recovery and prevention through 1Government Procurement Alliance (1GPA)

Cost Neutrality
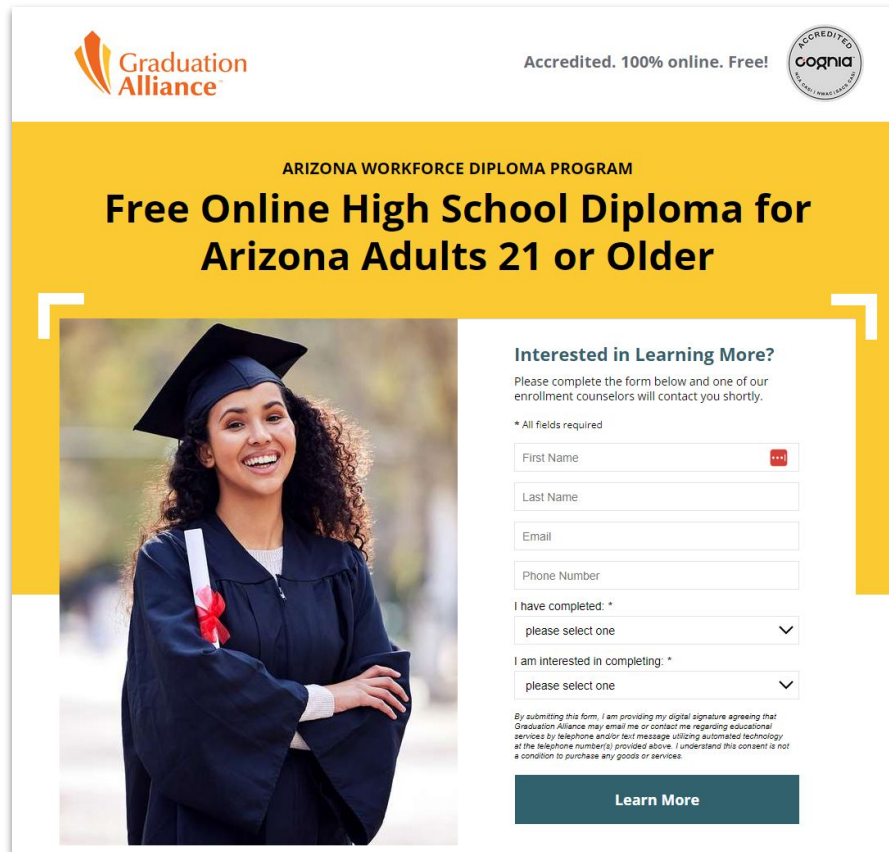
❏ Pricing is based on Total HS Base SY 2023 = $6,231.85 (plus any additional weights).

❏ Districts claim 1/12 of the their per-pupil funding each month a student is making satisfactory academic progress.

❏ Graduation Alliance only bills if a student is meeting the state's definition of satisfactory academic progress.

❏ Districts pay Graduation Alliance a percentage of their state aid and keep a percentage of the state aid.

Number of Enrollments	Percentage of State Aide Paid to GA	Amount of State Aid Paid to GA Per Month
1-39	88%	$550
40-99	87%	$545
100 +	80%	$499

Arizona Workforce Diploma Program

A state-funded program available to Arizona residents aged 21 or older who left high school before earning a diploma or diploma equivalent

- Fully accredited
- Results in a state-issued diploma, not a GED
- 100% online and free