Study: 1st Grade Dropout Indicators Found

[news](#) story by [James Dugan](#) | July 29, 2013

While school districts and state departments of education have been tracking dropout indicators in students for a while, educators in Montgomery County in Maryland are building an early warning system designed to help students in the first grade.

According to a study by the Everyone Graduates Center at the Johns Hopkins University's School of Education, the early warning system that they are building can identify red flags for 75 percent of future dropouts as early as the second semester of 1st grade.

"It's a very sobering point, but I take it as an opportunity: if these kids are always with us, we can do something about this," Thomas "Chris" C. West, Montgomery County's evaluation specialist who built the tracking formula and performed the study, said to Education Week. "Remember, these are signs of students who drop out—it doesn't mean they are dropouts."

The study indicates that end-of-year attendance files provided to the Maryland State Department of Education each year categorize students who drop out of MCPS as either having a lack of personal motivation or interest to continue their education, or having a lack of academic success, including low grades and/or retention.

"These are both signs of a lack of student engagement (i.e., investment and motivation towards school)," West wrote in the study. "Fortunately, students who drop out of school exhibit a pattern of behaviors that are generally identifiable in advance."

Among some of the findings in the study on first graders are the following:

• Students absent from school nine or more times are twice as likely to drop out of high school

• Students suspended (in- or out-of-school) one or more times can be up to five times as likely to drop out of high school

• Students below grade level in reading and/or mathematics are twice as likely to drop out of high school

• Students having a calculated third marking period GPA below a 1.20 are twice as likely to drop out of high school

These numbers only get worse as students move up in school. For example, a third grade student is twice as likely to dropout if he or she only misses three or more times, and they are three times as likely to do so in the 9th grade.

West, however, explains that the report card is a strong tool that should be used to not only help identify these students, but inform all support systems around the student of their situation.

"A parent has the report card, student has report card, teacher has a report card," Mr. West said, "so if we base our conversation on the report card, at least everybody's talking from the same page."

Ultimately, however, all of this data is moot, if nothing is done about it. These are just indicators and are not solutions to the problems; it's on teachers and parents to provide solutions.

"You will not reduce dropout rates by [identifying] the students; it's what you do with them," West said. "Early-warning systems are not an intervention strategy; they are part of an intervention strategy. They are not a magic bullet."