

Increasing High School Graduation Rates

Through our Priority Schools Campaign, the National Education Association (NEA) has made a commitment to transform the nation's low-performing schools—including high schools—into great public schools for every student.

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In 2010-11, the Priority School Campaign will assist middle and high schools in school districts around the country with:

- A local School Improvement Grant from their state department of education to implement the federal “school transformation” reform model.
- A strong relationship with the local NEA affiliate that has resulted in a joint decision to work together to decrease dropout rates and increase graduation rates.

Focusing on What Makes a Difference

Our work with “transformation” middle and high schools is grounded in elements of change the NEA Foundation has used successfully to accelerate the learning of students in high-needs schools.

The first element—building upon, and strengthening, collaboration between local education associations and school districts—has proven to be a powerful force for improving student performance by enabling districts and schools to more effectively:

- Enhance the capacity and expertise of the educators who work in priority secondary schools ;
- Increase families’ engagement in their teen’s education; and
- Leverage community health, nutrition, and social services.

Meeting a Community Challenge

The nation’s dropout crisis is located in specific areas, and those areas have been identified. The crisis is among students from low-income homes in specific high schools in the communities in which the schools are located.

Therefore, NEA’s Priority Schools Campaign will:

- Build the collective will to take action through community-wide conversations, coalitions, and partnerships.
- Reach out to stakeholders who will benefit from dropout reduction, including groups interested in educational excellence, economic growth, youth development, and crime reduction.
- Involve local institutions that bear the costs of high dropout rates including businesses, civic groups, advocacy groups, law enforcement, health care, social services, and neighborhood organizations.

Giving Students More Graduation Options

We know that more students will stay in school and earn their regular high school diploma if they have more pathways to graduation.

Therefore, NEA's Priority Schools Campaign will work with NEA affiliates and policymakers to:

- Expand students' graduation options through creative partnerships around career and technical education, with alternative schools, and community colleges.
- Increase career education and workforce readiness programs in schools so that students see the connection between school and careers.

To address the unique needs of over-age students who wish to complete their high school education, we will work to:

- Establish high school graduation centers for students 19-21 years old that provide specialized instruction and counseling apart from younger students.

Keeping Students On-Track to Graduation

This may be the single most important focus for NEA members in the Priority Schools Campaign's middle and high schools:

- Give students individual attention in safe schools; smaller learning communities; small classes; and summer, weekend, and before- and after-school programs.
- Involve families in students' learning at school and at home so that all

families can support their children's learning, help them engage in healthy behaviors, and stay actively involved through graduation.

- Monitor students' academic progress in school through a variety of measures during the year that provide a full picture of students' learning and help teachers make sure students do not fall behind.

Providing Dropout Prevention Resources

We know that additional resources need to be targeted to the nation's dropout crisis if we are to solve it.

Therefore, NEA's Priority Schools Campaign will work to:

- Ensure that educators have the training and resources they need including professional development; up-to-date textbooks/materials, technology; and safe modern schools.
- Promote accurate and uniform dropout and graduation rates for student racial/ethnic and economic groups; benchmarks for eliminating dropouts; and standardized calculation and reporting methods.
- Act early so students do *not* drop out with high-quality, universal preschool and full-day K; strong elementary programs; and middle school programs that lay the foundation for success in high school.

For More Information

Visit <http://neapriorityschools.org> for more information about NEA's Priority Schools Campaign and our work with "transformation" middle and high schools in 2010-11