Issue Brief: Case Management in High Schools

July 2017

Introduction

In 2014–15, the high school graduation rate reached a record high of 83 percent (U.S. Department of Education 2016). Despite the gains, over half a million students still drop out of high school each year (U.S. Department of Education 2015). High schools have adopted various strategies designed to keep students who are at risk of not graduating in school and on track for earning the credits required to graduate. "At-risk" students are defined as those failing to achieve basic proficiency in key subjects or exhibiting behaviors that can lead to failure and/or dropping out of school. Dropout prevention strategies are diverse; they vary in type of program, services used, frequency, intensity, and duration of contact with target students.

The U.S. Department of Education (Department) sponsored the **National Survey on High School Strategies Designed to Help At-Risk Students Graduate (HSS),** which aimed to provide descriptive information on the prevalence and characteristics of dropout prevention strategies for at-risk students. The survey collected data in the 2014–15 school year from a nationally representative sample of 2,142 public high schools and focused on 13 specific high school improvement strategies[1] identified by a panel of external experts and senior Department officials. All findings are based on self-reported data from school principals. This brief on **case management** is the tenth in a series of briefs being released this year with key findings about these high school improvement strategies.

Definition of Case Management

The HSS defined **case management** as a school-based intervention in which a social worker or school professional (referred to as a case manager in this brief) provides intensive advising to students who are at risk of dropping out and connects them to an array of services to address their academic and nonacademic needs. Case managers provide regular monitoring of services and follow-up with students as needed. These services are designed to improve a student's health, educational outcomes, and welfare and may include monitoring student academic performance and attendance; raising the expectations for students in setting educational/career goals and providing advice about postsecondary options; improving student engagement in school; reducing the incidence of at-risk behavior and developing conflict resolution skills; addressing family issues or concerns; and referring students to community resources for further assistance.

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[1] The survey examined 13 strategies designed to improve high school outcomes for at-risk students. These strategies are: (1) academic support classes, (2) academic tutoring, (3) career-themed curriculum, (4) case management, (5) college-level coursework, (6) competency-based advancement, (7) credit recovery, (8) early warning systems, (9) high school transition activities, (10) mentoring, (11) personalized learning plans, (12) social services, and (13) student support teams. See http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opepd/ppss/reports-high-school.html for the series of briefs.

Research on Case Management

Few rigorous studies have focused specifically on the effectiveness of school-based case management models on high school graduation. As a broker of services to meet individual students' needs, case managers can offer guidance and develop wraparound services to address the various obstacles that may prevent students from progressing in school. There is some research suggesting "wraparound services" may help students improve their mental health and juvenile justice outcomes. Wraparound services are provided by a team of practitioners who deliver a wide range of services for children and their families that address the full spectrum of health, education, safety, and welfare needs. A meta-analysis of seven studies documented the effects of youth receiving wraparound services compared with youth who did not receive wraparound services. Studies found that youth receiving wraparound services were in a more stable living environment and had slightly better mental health, youth functioning, school functioning, and juvenile justice-related outcomes (Suter and Bruns 2009). One case management model, Communities In Schools, that has been evaluated did not show impacts in the first year, with authors noting that it may take more than one year to show an effect (Corrin et al. 2015).

Survey Findings on Case Management

This brief describes the prevalence of case management as a high school dropout prevention strategy. It does not measure the effectiveness of case management, but instead describes the implementation of case management in high schools across the country. All findings are based on self-reported data from school principals. This analysis included an examination of four school characteristics: (1) size, (2) poverty, (3) locale, and (4) graduation rate. Only statistically significant differences within school characteristics (at $p < .05$) are discussed; non-statistically significant differences are not reported. School characteristics were defined in the following ways.

School size. School size categories consisted of small schools (fewer than 500 students), medium schools (500–1,199 students), and large schools (1,200 or more students) based on 2013–14 Common Core of Data (CCD) student enrollment data.

School poverty. Poverty levels were based on 2013–14 free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) and total CCD school enrollment data. The poverty categories were low-poverty schools (below 35 percent students with FRPL), medium-poverty schools (35–49 percent students with FRPL), and high-poverty schools (50 percent or more students with FRPL).

School locale. School locale included three mutually exclusive locales from the CCD: rural schools, suburban/town schools, and city schools.

Graduation rate. School classification by graduation rate was based on three categories: low-graduation rate (67 percent or lower graduation rate), medium-graduation rate (68 to 89 percent graduation rate), and high-graduation rate (90 percent or higher graduation rate).

Summary of Key Findings

- Overall, 41 percent of high schools reported using case management for at least some students; about nine percent of high school students nationwide participated in some type of case management, according to school principals.

- Low-graduation rate schools were more likely than high-graduation rate schools to use case management; large schools were more likely than small schools to use case management; and more city and suburban schools used case management than rural schools.

- Among high schools offering case management, the most common type of case management activity was preventing at-risk behavior through techniques such as coaching and behavioral support (87 percent), followed by monitoring student's progress to help them stay on track academically (86 percent), modeling positive and respectful behavior (86 percent), and improving student engagement in school (82 percent).

- Among high schools offering case management, schools most commonly targeted students on the basis of their academic performance (55 percent), followed by discipline or behavioral issues (49 percent), staff referrals (47 percent), and attendance problems (42 percent).

- Of the schools that used case management, 65 percent reported that students were expected to meet with their case managers daily or weekly, 11 percent reported that students were expected to meet with their case manager every other week, and 17 percent reported that students were expected to meet with their case manager monthly or less frequently.

What is the prevalence of case management in high schools?

Overall, 41 percent of high schools reported using case management for at least some students; about nine percent of high school students nationwide participated in some type of case management, according to school principals. The prevalence of case management differed by school size, school locale and graduation rate (Exhibit 1). There were no significant differences by school poverty level.

**Exhibit 1. Percentage of high schools that used case management
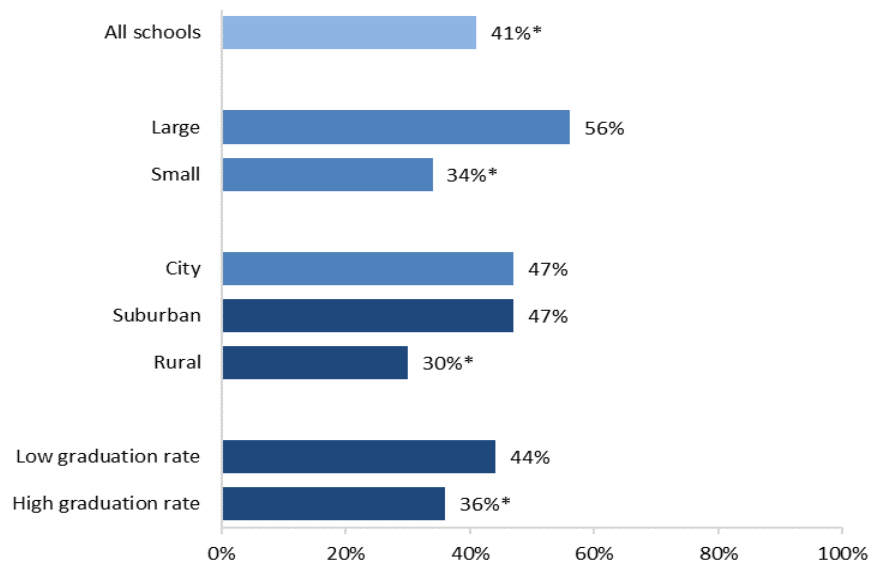by selected school characteristics, 2014–15**

Exhibit reads: In 2014–15, 41 percent of high schools used case management for at least some students.

* *p* < .05.

NOTE: An asterisk indicates statistical significance. The asterisk is placed on one case per comparison. Differences across school characteristics with two categories were based on comparisons between the two groups. Differences across school characteristics with three categories were based on goodness-of-fit across all three categories.

Unweighted *n* = 1,925.

SOURCE: HSS survey of high school administrators, 2015 (Question 5).

Differences by school size. Large schools were more likely than small schools to use case management (56 percent versus 34 percent).

Differences by school locale. More city and suburban schools used case management than rural schools (47 percent of city and 47 percent of suburban schools versus 30 percent of rural schools).

Differences by graduation rate. Low-graduation-rate schools were more likely than high-graduation-rate schools to use case management (44 percent versus 36 percent).

What types of case management activities did high schools offer?
Among high schools offering case management, the most common type of case management activity was preventing at-risk behavior through techniques such as coaching and behavioral support (87 percent), followed by monitoring student's progress to help them stay on track academically (86 percent); modeling positive and respectful behavior (86 percent); improving student engagement in school (82 percent); exploring community resources to address a student's individual needs (80 percent); and addressing family issues or concerns (80 percent). There were differences in case management activities by school size, school poverty level, school locale, and graduation rate (Exhibit 2).

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Differences by school size. Large schools were more likely than small schools to offer case management activities that focused on ensuring students stay on track academically (93 percent versus 82 percent), monitoring student attendance (86 percent versus 68 percent), and helping students select classes (64 percent versus 47 percent).

Differences by school poverty. High-poverty schools were more likely than low-poverty schools to offer case management activities that focused on addressing family issues or concerns (85 percent versus 76 percent); low-poverty schools were more likely than high-poverty schools to offer case management activities that focused on helping students select classes (63 percent versus 47 percent).

Differences by school locale. More city and suburban schools offered case management activities that focused on monitoring student attendance than rural schools (79 percent of city schools and 81 percent of suburban schools versus 64 percent of rural schools).

Differences by graduation rate. Low-graduation-rate schools were more likely than high-graduation-rate schools to offer case management activities that focused on improving student engagement in school (88 percent versus 79 percent) and addressing family issues or concerns (85 percent versus 77 percent). High-graduation-rate schools were more likely than low-graduation-rate schools to offer case management activities that focused on helping students select classes (60 percent versus 42 percent).

Exhibit 2. Among high schools that used case management, the percentage that offered specific activities by graduation rate, school size, school poverty level, and school locale, 2014–15

Type of activities	All schools with case management	Graduation rate		Size		Poverty		Locale		
		Low	High	Large	Small	High	Low	City	Suburban	Rural
Prevent at-risk behavior	87%	90%	86%	84%	87%	88%	84%	82%	89%	87%
Model positive & respectful behavior	86%	88%	86%	84%	86%	88%	84%	85%	89%	83%
Ensure students stay on track academically	86%	82%	86%	**93%***	**82%**	83%	88%	89%	86%	82%
Improve student engagement in school	82%	**88%***	**79%**	82%	84%	84%	81%	84%	83%	78%
Explore community resources to meet individual needs	80%	81%	77%	81%	82%	84%	77%	84%	80%	76%
Address family issues or concerns	80%	**85%***	**77%**	75%	82%	**85%***	**76%**	82%	81%	75%
Develop conflict resolution skills	77%	80%	76%	73%	78%	80%	76%	75%	78%	76%
Help raise students' educational or career goals	77%	77%	75%	77%	78%	76%	75%	78%	79%	73%
Monitor attendance	76%	78%	76%	**86%***	**68%**	76%	74%	**79%***	**81%**	**64%**
Provide advice about postsecondary options	74%	72%	70%	78%	75%	75%	70%	78%	74%	70%
Help select classes	54%	**42%***	**60%**	**64%***	**47%**	**47%***	**63%**	52%	57%	54%

Exhibit reads: Among high schools that used case management in 2014–15, 87 percent offered activities to students to prevent at-risk behavior.

*$p < .05$.

NOTE: The asterisk is placed on one case per comparison. Differences across school characteristics with two categories were based on comparisons between the two groups. Differences across school characteristics with three categories were based on goodness-of-fit across all three categories.

Unweighted n = 801.

SOURCE: HSS survey of high school administrators, 2015 (Question 13).

How did high schools target students for participation in case management?
Among high schools with case management, schools most commonly targeted students on the basis of their academic performance (55 percent), followed by discipline or behavioral issues (49 percent), staff referrals (47 percent), and attendance problems (42 percent). The criteria schools used to target students for case management differed by school size, school poverty level, school locale, and graduation rate (Exhibit 3).

Differences by school size. Small schools were more likely than large schools to target students on the basis of their academic performance (61 percent versus 49 percent) for case management; large schools were more likely than small schools to target English learner (EL) students (36 percent versus 26 percent) for case management.

Differences by school poverty. High-poverty schools were more likely than low-poverty schools to target students with discipline or behavioral issues (58 percent versus 41 percent) and attendance issues (52 percent versus 35 percent) for case management.

Differences by school locale. More rural schools targeted students on the basis of their academic performance than city or suburban schools (64 percent of rural schools versus 51 percent of city schools and 52 percent of suburban schools) for case management. More city and suburban schools targeted students at a particular grade level than rural schools (16 percent of city schools and 10 percent of suburban schools versus 6 percent of rural schools) for case management. For example, some high schools may target first-year high school students to provide greater support.

Differences by graduation rate. Low-graduation-rate schools were more likely than high-graduation-rate schools to target students with discipline or behavioral issues (64 percent versus 43 percent) for case management; high-graduation-rate schools were more likely than low-graduation-rate schools to target EL students (30 percent versus 13 percent) for case management.

Exhibit 3. Percentage of high schools that targeted specific student subgroups or issues for participation in case management, 2014–15

Targeted subgroup	All schools with case management	Graduation rate		Size		Poverty		Locale		
		Low	High	Large	Small	High	Low	City	Suburban	Rural
Performing below standards/grade level	55%	55%	55%	49%*	61%	55%	55%	51%*	52%	64%
Discipline or behavioral issues	49%	64%*	43%	43%	52%	58%*	41%	49%	49%	47%
Referred by high school staff	47%	47%	42%	42%	50%	50%	41%	48%	43%	51%
Attendance issues	42%	48%	37%	39%	41%	52%*	35%	45%	41%	41%
English Learners	31%	13%*	30%	36%*	26%	33%	32%	32%	31%	31%
Reentry students	13%	23%	7%	12%	13%	15%	11%	18%	12%	9%
Particular grade level	10%	15%	6%	6%	10%	12%	8%	16%*	10%	6%

Exhibit reads: Among high schools that used case management in 2014–15, 55 percent targeted students who were performing below standards or grade level.

*$p < .05$.

NOTE: An asterisk indicates statistical significance. The asterisk is placed on one case per comparison. Differences across school characteristics with two categories were based on comparisons between the two groups. Differences across school characteristics with three categories were based on goodness-of-fit across all three categories.

Unweighted n = 488.

SOURCE: HSS survey of high school administrators, 2015 (Question 9).

How frequently did students meet with case managers?

Of the schools that used case management, 65 percent reported that students were expected to meet with their case managers daily or weekly, 11 percent reported that students were expected to meet with their case manager every other week, and 17 percent reported that students were expected to meet with their case manager monthly or less frequently. Seven percent responded that they did not know. There was some variation in the frequency of scheduled meetings with case managers by school size; however, there were no differences by graduation rate, school poverty level, and school locale.

> *Differences by school size.* Small schools were more likely than large schools to report that case managers met with their students daily (25 percent versus 13 percent).

Methodology

The **National Survey on High School Strategies Designed to Help At-Risk Students Graduate** was a survey of 13 high school strategies designed to improve graduation rates among students at risk of dropping out and was administered in the 2014–15 school year. The 13 strategies are: (1) academic support classes, (2) academic tutoring, (3) career-themed curriculum, (4) case management, (5) college-level coursework, (6) competency-based advancement, (7) credit recovery, (8) early warning systems, (9) high school transition activities, (10) mentoring, (11) personalized learning plans, (12) social services, and (13) student support teams.

The purpose of the survey was to inform education practitioners and policymakers about the prevalence, characteristics, and students served by these strategies in U.S. public high schools. The descriptive study did not measure the effectiveness of particular strategies but instead examined implementation factors in high schools across the country. The study team identified the 13 strategies and designed survey items for each strategy with input from a panel of external experts in the field and senior Department officials. All findings are based on self-reported data from school principals.

The researchers selected a nationally representative sample of high schools[2] using a random sampling approach, stratifying high schools based on graduation rate (from ED*Facts*)[3] and locale code (from NCES 2013–14 Common Core of Data). The survey collected data from high school principals (or designees knowledgeable about programs and strategies) at sampled schools. The survey response rate was 90 percent. The survey responses, after cleaning and processing, were analyzed in SAS and Stata using

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[2] All U.S. public high schools providing instruction to 12th grade students in the fall of 2010 were included in the sampling frame unless (1) the lowest offered grade was 11th grade or higher, (2) there were fewer than five students in grades 9 through 12, (3) the percentage of students enrolled in grades 9 through 12 was under 20 percent of the total school enrollment and the total number of students in grades 9 through 12 was fewer than 20, or (4) the school name contained one of nine keywords indicating juvenile detention center or hospital. Of the 103,813 total schools listed in the 2010–11 CCD, 22,447 high schools met the criteria to be included in the sampling frame.

[3] There were 3,302 schools without graduation rate information in the 2010–11 ED*Facts* public use data set. The researchers used an imputation approach to assign these schools to either the high- or low-graduation-rate stratum. The imputation process began by examining the distribution of the high/low graduation rate classification for 19,145 schools by sampling locale. The percentage of schools classified as high graduation rate was calculated separately for each locale sampling stratum; 68.4 percent of rural schools were classified as high graduation rate, 63.0 percent of suburban schools were classified as high graduation rate, and 41.0 percent of city schools were classified as high graduation rate. The research team randomly assigned each of the 3,302 schools with unknown graduation rates to the high graduation rate stratum with probability 68.4 if the school was classified as rural, with probability 63.0 if the school was classified as suburban, and with probability 41.0 if the school was classified as urban. The sample size was adjusted upwards to account for potential misclassification due to this method. In analysis, the researchers used the restricted-use 2013–14 ED*Facts* data and graduation rates published on school and district websites to fill in this missing data.

descriptive techniques that apply the appropriate statistical population weights to account for stratification by graduation rate and locale.

Results reported in this brief reflect the full survey sample unless otherwise noted and are representative of U.S. public high schools nationwide. References in the text to differences between subgroups based on sample data refer only to differences that are statistically significant using a significance level of 0.05.

References

Corrin, W., L. M. Prise, O. Cerna, Z. Haider, and M. Somers. 2015. Case Management for Students at Risk of Dropping Out: Implementation and Interim Impact Findings from the Communities in Schools Evaluation. New York, NY: MDRC.

Suter, J. C., and Bruns, E. J. 2009. "Effectiveness of the Wraparound Process for Children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: A Meta-Analysis." Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review 12(4): 336-351.

U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. 2016. "Table 1. Public High School 4-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR)." https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/ACGR_RE_and_characteristics_2014-15.asp

U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. 2015. "Table 219.57. Population of 15- to 24-Year Olds Enrolled in Grades 10 through 12, Number Who Dropped Out (Event Dropouts), Percentage Who Dropped Out (Event Dropout Rate), and Percentage Distribution, by Selected Characteristics: 2014." https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_219.57.asp

Appendix: Case Management (Survey Excerpt)
National Survey on High School Strategies Designed to Help At-Risk Students Graduate

> This section asks about a **case manager.** For the purposes of this survey, a case manager is an adult broker of different services to meet individual students' needs, including academic, social, health, and financial (e.g., case management model, intrusive advising). A case manager is **not** a traditional high school counselor who focuses primarily on academic advising.

5. **In the 2014-15 school year, does your school have case managers?**
   (Please select only one)
   {Only allow one selection}

Yes	No
☐	☐

If user responds "Yes" to Q5, ask Q6 through Q14. Otherwise, skip to Q15.

6. **What is the typical caseload for the case managers in your school?**
   (Please select only one)
   {Only allow one selection}

1 to 10 students	11 to 15 students	16 to 20 students	More than 20 students
☐	☐	☐	☐

7. **How are case managers allocated to students?**
   (Please select only one)
   {Only allow one selection}

Offered of all students (school-wide)	☐
Offered to a subset of students	☐
Assigned to all students (school-wide)	☐
Assigned to a subset of students	☐

If user responds "Subset of students" to Q7 ask Q8 & Q0. Otherwise, skip to Q10.

8. **On average, approximately what percentage of high school students in your school receives a case manager in the 2014-15 school year?**   {Slide bar for 0% to 100%}

9. **Are any of the following subsets of students targeted for receiving a case manager?**
    (Check all that apply)
    Students with attendance issues (e.g., truancy) ☐
    Students with discipline or behavioral issues ☐
    Students performing <u>below</u> standards or grade level ☐
    Students in a particular grade level, regardless of performance ☐
    Students referred by high school staff (e.g., counselor or teacher) ☐
    Reentry students ☐
    English Language Learners ☐
    Other ☐
           (Please Specify_____)

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10. **Typically, which of the following qualifications do the case managers in your school have?** (Please select one option for each row)	Required to have	Sometimes have	Never have	Don't know
Licensed in a mental health field (e.g., social work)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Licensed in a physical health field (e.g., nursing)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Law degree	☐	☐	☐	☐
Paralegal degree	☐	☐	☐	☐
High school counselor	☐	☐	☐	☐
Certified teacher or certified support staff	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other	☐	☐	☐	☐
(Please specify: _____)				

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11. **Do the case managers in your school provide their services at your school location?**	Always	Sometimes	Never	Don't know
	☐	☐	☐	☐

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12. **Do the case managers typically fill any other roles or duties at your school?** (Please select one option for each row)	Always	Sometimes	Never	Don't know
Teaching duties	☐	☐	☐	☐
Administrative duties	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social work duties	☐	☐	☐	☐
School nurse or medical duties	☐	☐	☐	☐
Guidance counselor	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mental health counselor or psychologist	☐	☐	☐	☐

13. What types of services do case manager(s) in your school provide?
(Check all that apply)

Ensure that students stay on track academically	☐
Provide advice about postsecondary options	☐
Help raise students' educational or career goals	☐
Improve student engagement in school	☐
Prevent at-risk behavior	
Model positive and respectful behavior	☐
Develop conflict resolution skills	☐
Monitor attendance	
Help select classes	
Address family issues or concerns	☐
Explore community resources to address individual needs	☐
Other	☐

(Please Specify_____)

14. On average, how often do students meet with their case manager?
(Please select only one)
{Only allow one selection}

Daily	☐
Weekly	☐
Every other week	☐
Once a month	☐
Less frequently than once a month	☐
I don't know	☐

The full survey is available at: http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opepd/ppss/reports-high-school.html