Abstract

One of the most important measures of success of a high school is its graduation rate. There are many factors that influence whether or not students graduate in the traditional four-year schedule. Student motivation and achievement certainly are primary reasons students may meet this expectation, but oftentimes there are other issues that contribute to the delay of on-time graduation. Sometimes these factors are actually beyond the control of the student. Frequent student mobility, socio-economic disadvantages, and behavioral issues are reasons that often impede on-time graduation for students. Students affected by these issues desperately need schools to be flexible and find options to keep them in school and on course to graduate with their cohort. Of the students who eventually drop out, one-third are behind in their coursework in the 9th grade (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010).

The purpose of this initiative was to examine the impact of student mobility, socio-economic distress, and chronic negative behavior on on-time graduation, as well, evaluate and develop programs and protocols that provide options to help students retain and regain credits needed to graduate with their cohort. This work studied students and personnel in three demographically different high schools in North Carolina: a large, urban school in Cary, NC drawing from an affluent area; a large school located near a military base in Fayetteville, NC; and a small, mountain school serving many students who are socio-economically disadvantaged in Murphy, NC.

Data were gathered through the spring, summer, and fall semesters of 2015. The research practitioners investigated data drawn from a variety of credit recovery and retention options, including, a personalized registration program and several on-line programs, such as GradPoint, Study Island, and Edgenuity. One research practitioner also identified effective strategies to create a training program for school counselors to assist students in retaining and regaining credits toward graduation. This qualitative data gives voice to the students who often have no voice when it comes to making decisions when they fall behind their cohort, and provides counselors with the tools to assist these students. Qualitative data were gathered through a variety of research methods, including surveys, interviews, case studies, and focus groups. These methods were selected because of their ability to solicit the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of those participating in the improvement change (Creswell, 2012). The intent of this work was to increase options for students at risk of not graduating on time, thereby improving their chance of staying in school and graduating with their cohort.