

EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

FOR STUDENTS AT RISK
OF DROPPING OUT

Policy and Practice Pointers for Enrolling All Children
and Adolescents in School and Preventing Dropout

SCHOOL



Early Warning Systems for students at risk of dropping out

UNICEF helps countries and education professionals improve their strategies to prevent school dropout. Building on the Education Participation Series¹, this brief on Early Warning Systems for students at risk of dropping out aims to guide education decision-makers and schools on dropout prevention.

Education is a fundamental human right. It is the foundation that enables children and adolescents to grow, develop and gain the knowledge, values and skills they need to reach their full potential, gain economic independence and play an active role in their communities and societies. Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) calls for a free, equitable and good quality primary and secondary education for all girls and boys by 2030, leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. To achieve this goal, it is vital that each and every child completes their education, without dropping out along the way.

There is growing evidence of the significant social and economic returns of education – including at upper secondary level – for individuals and for entire societies. The list of benefits is impressive: better lives, better health, greater gender equality, greater social cohesion, greater incomes, more tax leverage for governments, reduced crime and risky behaviour among young people, and a lower burden on social welfare, health and justice budgets (UNICEF, 2017).

Given these benefits, it is not surprising that the prevention of dropout has become a priority for most governments across the world. The Europe 2020 Strategy, for example, aims to reduce the share of early leavers from education and training to less than 10 percent.² The prevention of dropout and early school leaving is also seen as a key strategy to support adolescents and youth and maximise their chances of making a good transition from education into the workplace.

An Early Warning System (EWS) is one of many approaches to prevent dropout. This brief explains the contexts in which an EWS is a good option to prevent dropout. It also presents a five-step approach to develop an EWS and questions that should be addressed to maximise its impact.

1 When are Early Warning Systems an effective response to dropout?

About dropout

There is seldom one single reason for a child or adolescent to drop out of school. Instead, this is a process shaped by many factors that interact in ways that are both complex and dynamic. These factors can relate not only to individual and family characteristics or circumstances, but also to factors at school, community and national level. These can span weaknesses in school environments and practices, in education and social welfare systems, in broader social policies for youth and employment, and in social norms – including

1 See <https://www.unicef.org/eca/reports/monitoring-education-participation> and <https://www.unicef.org/eca/reports/improving-education-participation>

2 In the European Union, Early School Leavers refer to “those young people who leave education and training with only lower secondary education or less, and who are no longer in education and training” (European Commission, 2013).

gender norms that can work against education. When children and adolescents drop out, it is often the result of “individual and family circumstances that structures and systems are unable to respond to or address appropriately.” (UNICEF, 2017).

This complex and overlapping mix of challenges requires multi-pronged strategies and interventions to address many factors at the same time: from school practices, teaching, learning and emotional well-being, to holistic multi-sector approaches to support children and adolescents at risk of dropping out, while also tackling socio-economic factors and social norms (UNICEF, 2017).

What is an Early Warning System for dropout prevention?

An EWS is a tool that aims to identify students at risk of dropping out of school, based on the presence of ‘red flags’: specific factors that contribute to dropout. Having identified them, the EWS then supports them to stay in school through strategies and interventions to meet their specific needs. It is a **system** (i.e. a sequence of procedures that have been thought through and that are recognised and shared by all concerned staff) that enables schools or education authorities to recognise a **red flag warning** at an early stage – before the student has dropped out and early enough to put in place appropriate support to keep them in school). *In short, an EWS is a system that enables schools and education authorities to identify students with specific needs and support them in a timely and appropriate way.*

In which contexts is an EWS an effective response to dropout?

An EWS is one strategy to address dropout and cannot, as a standalone intervention, solve the dropout problem entirely.³ It cannot, for example, compensate for severe deprivation. An EWS seems to have less impact in a low-income country, according to a USAID impact evaluation in Cambodia, Timor-Leste, India and Tajikistan (Creative Associates, 2015). This suggests that an approach focused on the individual, such as an EWS, may not be adequate in countries or locations where dropout rates are very high as a result of widespread deprivation and poverty.

In such contexts, dropout strategies at national and local level usually have to address a combination of supply and demand-side interventions.

- addressing structural issues within the education system: number and location of schools, school infrastructure, teacher quality, curriculum, positive discipline and child friendliness
- addressing poverty and the opportunity cost of education through financial subsidies (e.g. social benefits) and waiving of fees for meals, textbooks or transport
- addressing education demand and raising awareness of families
- addressing compensation measures for students who dropped out of the system (e.g. second chance education)

For more information on comprehensive policies and practices for dropout prevention, see Improving Education Participation, [Volume 2](#) of UNICEF’s Series on Education Participation and Dropout Prevention (UNICEF, 2017).

³ An EWS only targets students in school. When children of compulsory school age do not start school on time or have never been to school, other measures must be devised to support their enrolment.

To be most effective, an EWS requires schools that are functional and that have some capacity to plan ahead and support students. It also requires external services and professionals, such as social workers, that can, to some extent, help students and families that are facing the most adverse or complex situations. Thus, an EWS needs schools that can make the link between both school-based and external support services - through specific roles assigned to teachers or school support staff.

An EWS is a good approach in your context if:

- school dropout rates are below 10 percent
- dropout reasons vary depending on the students and include a mix of economic, social and cultural factors
- schools have at least one of the following staff categories: homeroom teachers; school psychologist, social worker, social pedagogue, pedagogue, mediator or pedagogical assistant; a senior management staff member in charge of vulnerable students, school attendance or students' upbringing or care
- schools can call upon external services (including NGOs, local authorities, health, protection, and social services), even if coordination is inefficient and services are not always responsive.

Evidence of effectiveness of an EWS for dropout prevention

Experience in the United States, where EWSs have been in place for several decades, demonstrates that they provide good results when “accompanied by a clear and timely system of support for students identified as being at risk of leaving school early” (Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving, n.d.). In the European Union and in some other countries,⁴ EWS mechanisms have contributed to reduced absenteeism and dropout rates. They have also:

- increased awareness of schools and education authority staff of signs of potential dropout
- built a better understanding of students' situations among teachers and a perception among students that teachers value them more highly
- improved school-home relationships and fostered better communication between schools and parents
- improved capacities of schools in planning and in the collection, analysis and use of data in decision-making
- increased collaboration between schools and other stakeholders and services to support students at risk of dropping out.

2 Early Warning Systems in five steps

The Early Warning System cycle

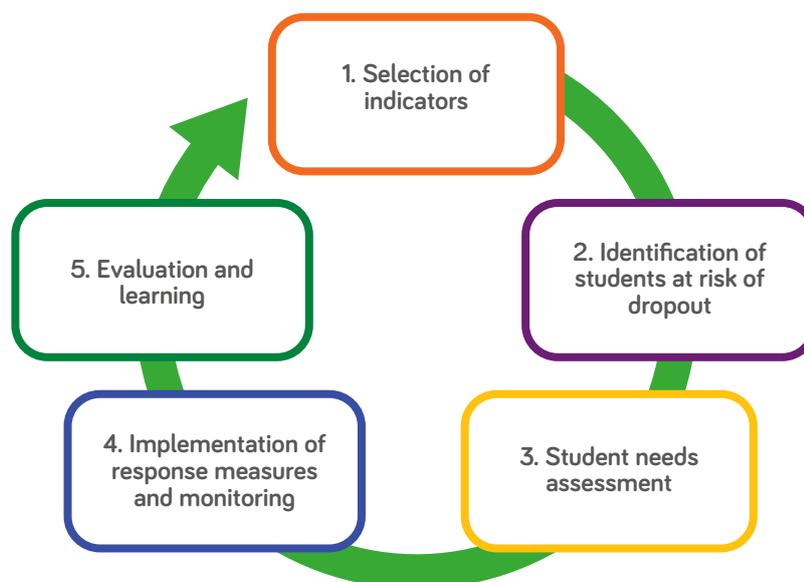
An EWS can take various shapes and forms and can build on existing school practices around attendance monitoring and support to the varied needs of students. In some countries, an EWS is embedded in regular

⁴ See, for example, UNICEF-supported pilot projects in Serbia (Jovanović et al., 2016), or in Kosovo UNSCR 1244, Albania or Tajikistan (Annex).

school monitoring or management systems (Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving, n.d.). In others, an EWS has been established as a specific approach to help schools identify students at risk and to organise support for those students in a systematic manner, as well as strengthening the overall capacity of a school to respond to students' needs and to improve school management and accountability towards young people and their families.

The five main steps of an EWS can be summarised as shown in Figure 1, with each step raising key questions that need to be addressed.

Figure 1. Early Warning Systems: the five steps



2.1 Step 1: Selection of indicators

The first step in any EWS is to select the indicators that will identify students at risk of dropping out in a given school. These indicators are based on 'predictors' or 'red flags' for dropout, which may vary across countries, locations, schools and individual circumstances, although some are common to many contexts. In Step 1, schools:

- set-up a group of school staff (management, teachers and support staff) to establish indicators for the EWS
- identify and prioritise the main risk factors and predictors of dropout, based on contextual evidence
- formulate an indicator for each predictor of dropout and identify how the data will be collected
- consider allocating different weights to different indicators to make the EWS sufficiently sensitive to dropout risks
- agree on thresholds upon which students will be identified 'at risk' or 'at high risk' of dropping out.

Questions to address in Step 1

What do we know about dropout in our school/geographical area? To inform the selection of dropout predictors, indicators and weighting systems, schools can analyse available information on dropout from previous years. First, who were the students who dropped out (girls, boys, grades, age, dropout dates)?

Second, why did they drop out (personal circumstances, low academic achievement, overaged for their grade compared to their peers, pregnancy, reached the end of compulsory school age, peer or family pressure, school bullying, employment)? Third, were there observable signs indicating that they might drop out (irregular attendance, behaviour issues, withdrawal from classroom activities, discussions with peers or teachers)? And finally, why did students drop out in other comparable schools in our area?

Which indicators for our EWS? Observable signs, such as frequent absenteeism for sickness, unauthorised absences, isolation from peers or a sudden drop in school performance are often better predictors of dropout than a personal or family characteristic (Mac Iver and Mac Iver, 2009). In the United States, for example, EWSs have focused on the ‘ABC’: **A**bsenteeism, **B**ehaviour and **A**cademic performance.⁵ Most schools include absenteeism and academic performance in their EWS, for which indicators can be easily formulated and data reliably collected (e.g. five unauthorised absences, attendance rate below 15 percent, achievement below mark X in language/math, etc.).

To complement these indicators, schools often add indicators that relate to:

- behaviour (e.g. number of suspensions, number of referrals to school senior management for discipline)
- socio-economic status (e.g. recipient of/eligible for social benefits, parents’ occupations)
- and special alerts to identify a specific issue or additional risk, such as:
 - living arrangements (e.g. homelessness, foster care)
 - disability or chronic illness
 - family circumstances (e.g. high family mobility, substance misuse or mental illness or disability of parent, young carer)
 - personal circumstances (e.g. young offender, child protection concerns)
 - sense of belonging to the school (e.g. perceived level of acceptance by teachers and peers).

How do we ensure that indicators are sensitive enough? Schools should avoid a situation whereby an EWS is identifying large numbers of students at risk or high risk of dropout. To do so, schools can test the combinations and weighting of indicators, prioritizing some indicators over others, such as absenteeism or indicators that are known, in a given environment, to point to a significant risk factor. These could be socio-economic indicators in some contexts, or family circumstances in others. Some schools count the number of indicators of risk for each student to determine whether they are at no, low, high or very high risk of dropping out. Others score each indicator according to a weighting system and develop a threshold that, if exceeded, signals that a student is at high or very high risk of dropping out. Schools can fine-tune indicator sets, weighting and scoring systems over time, based on evidence they gather on profiles of early leavers and the most important risk factors.

Are the data necessary for an EWS easily accessible and reliable in our school? Setting up an EWS can be time consuming at the outset, particularly for schools with weak routine data collection systems. When selecting indicators, schools should think about the data systems that need to underpin these indicators. They need to strike the right balance between indicators for which data can be generated automatically through electronic or well-managed paper-based systems, such as absenteeism or performance, and indicators that require more time for data collection, such as personal risk factors or a sense of belonging to the school. This

⁵ UNICEF uses **A**cademic performance, **B**ehaviour and **C**hronic Absenteeism in UNICEF-UIS (2016).

is crucial in schools with limited resources. One thing is certain: reliable absenteeism data is critical for an effective EWS. This includes accurate and regular data on justified, and non-justified absences and tardiness as well as the reasons for these.

In **Serbia**, UNICEF, the Centre for Education Policy and the Ministry of Education piloted a dropout prevention and EWS project (2014-2016). A dropout risk index was developed based on seven risk factors: socio-economic status of children, absenteeism, behaviour, academic achievement, recipient of/eligibility for social assistance, level of peer acceptance and other risk factors (e.g. neglect, pregnancy, refugee, etc.). Risk factors were assessed on the basis of a five-point scale matrix. Coefficients were used for each risk factor to calculate the dropout risk index. Students above a certain threshold were identified as being at high risk of dropping out.

Sources: Jovanović et al., 2016.

Additional information: *Monitoring Education Participation, Volume 1* of UNICEF's Series on Education Participation and Dropout Prevention (UNICEF and UIS, 2016), provides a list of risk factors and dropout predictors, as well as detailed information on how to create indicators to establish an EWS. The publication also includes useful definitions and information on how to strengthen data systems to monitor student participation in education. See in particular 'Step 6: Create an Early Warning System to Identify Students at Risk of Dropping Out'.

2.2 Step 2: Identification of students at risk of dropout

Once indicators are selected, the identification of students at risk of dropping out can take place. In Step 2, schools:

- establish how data will be collected and recorded for each indicator (by whom and how)
- draw up lists of students at risk and/or at high risk of dropping out on a regular basis
- ensure that personal data are protected.

Questions to think about in Step 2

Who should identify students at risk of dropping out in our school? Approaches vary depending on countries and schools, and the level of automation of the process. **Homeroom teachers** usually play a significant role in running the first 'screening' of students in the class for which they are responsible. Data might then be consolidated and analysed by a **school team**, such as a school dropout prevention team, as seen in Kosovo^{*,6} or a Care Team, as in the Netherlands, or by **management** when identifying students at

6 *UNSCR1244



risk is a clear component of regular school processes. An EWS works best when it adopts a **whole-school approach**: all school staff should be aware of the negative impact of dropout, possible dropout factors and dropout signs, and the types of dropout response interventions that are manageable within the school or available externally.

What EWS recording system should we use in our school? Schools use different systems, from paper to pre-formatted Excel Sheets to EWS software, depending on resources. EWS scoring sheets tend to be class-based and concise to give homeroom teachers and school management a rapid overview of students to be monitored in each class and the issues at stake.

Should the EWS be automated in our school? Where schools have resources and capacity, the identification of students at risk of dropping out tends to be automated. However, automated red flags on specific indicators are only an indication: they do not capture the protective factors that help students to stay in school and succeed in their education. Many schools, therefore, ensure that a human judgement from staff members who know students and their circumstances is combined with any automated EWS, including Green/Amber/Red coding systems that show various levels of risk.

When should we identify students at risk of dropping out in our school? An EWS should be based on triggers that systematically identify students who are over the threshold of a specific risk indicator (e.g. number of unauthorised absences). When this is the case, the identification of students at risk of dropping-out is continuous throughout the year. In countries where systems are not automated, identification sometimes takes place at the beginning of the academic year, or at the beginning of each term. When the identification is delayed, the system might not identify students “early enough” to be able to prevent their dropout. The timing of identification and response interventions is, therefore, critical in the implementation of an EWS.

How can we avoid labelling students? Not all at-risk students will drop-out! Students are resilient, and have strengths that can counter-balance their level of risk. These can include regular attendance, strong motivation, skills in core and non-core subjects, strong interest in other aspects of life and the world, or strong family, community or peer support networks. Labelling students as being ‘at risk’ can undermine their confidence. Many schools frame their EWS for dropout prevention as a student monitoring tool for this very reason.

In **Australia (Victoria State)**, schools use a *Student Mapping Tool* to identify students at risk of early school leaving. The Tool is a pre-programmed Excel spreadsheet drawing data from Victoria’s School Management Information System, which highlights dropout factors. A red flag is raised automatically for students at risk of early school leaving. Teachers can then make a judgement on whether a student really is at risk of dropping out and, if so, discuss in-school support programmes with the student and their family, or make a referral to support services. The Tool also enables schools to record the support programmes they have in place, so they can compare students’ needs and the support available. The Tool helps schools to “assess and plan for school needs, monitor individual student progress, evaluate the efficacy of the interventions being used and assist schools in reporting and student management.” The Tool is accompanied by a *Privacy Guide* covering data protection, data security and how to handle sensitive information.

Source: Victoria State Government Education and Training (n.d.)

2.3 Step 3: Student needs assessment

The indicators used in the EWS enable the identification of students at risk of disengagement and academic failure, but more information is necessary for school staff to understand the reasons for the signs of dropout risk and identify relevant support provision. In Step 3, schools:

- establish an approach to assess the various needs of students at risk of dropping out
- have discussions with students and their family to understand their situation, shed light on the observable signs of dropout risk and talk about measures to improve the situation
- have discussions with other relevant stakeholders
- use available information to choose measures to support students at risk of dropping out
- ensure that sensitive information is handled appropriately and protected.

Questions to think about in Step 3

Who should conduct the needs assessment of students at risk of dropping out? Several school staff might be well placed to talk to students and assess their needs: the homeroom teacher, a school pedagogue, social-pedagogue or school psychologist, a school-based social worker, a management staff member with responsibilities for students' attendance or wellbeing, or a teacher trusted by the student. A combination of all of these could be helpful, depending on student's situation and school resources.

What should the needs assessment cover and how should it be implemented? The aim is to understand three issues. First, why a red flag has been raised on one or several of the indicators of the EWS. Second, what the school or other stakeholders can do to help the student remain in school and progress in their learning. And third, whether the student is at risk of neglect, abuse or violence and needs to be referred to social services.

School staff will investigate the underlying factors affecting poor attendance, low academic performance, poor behaviour and how personal or family circumstances affect the student's education. They will also identify the student's strengths and interests, as well as protective factors that will increase resilience and reduce the risk of dropout or academic failure. Discussion with the student and the family is a basic requirement, both to identify these underlying factors and to explore possible measures to improve the situation.

Information can also be gathered from other sources such as peers, other teachers and school support staff, student school records, questionnaires or psychometric tests. In some instances, community members can also provide information, such as sport coaches or youth NGO volunteers. When children face complex situations, social workers might also be able to disclose specific information.

How do we engage appropriately with students at risk of dropping out and their families? Engaging meaningfully and constructively with students and families requires school staff to build relationships based on mutual trust, respect, transparency and accountability; active listening and non-judgemental attitudes; warmth, empathy and honesty; and confidentiality. Discussions with students and their families should enhance their own ability to solve problems with limited outside intervention. Schools must consider that parents might have had negative experiences when engaging with schools in the past as students or as parents.

How do we record information about students? While EWS indicator sheets tend to be concise to provide a rapid overview of students for monitoring purposes, information generated through the needs assessment process is often recorded separately. Confidential information might only be kept and seen by authorised staff in the school, such as the school director or the school psychologist. The amount of information to record will depend on the cases of individual students, a school's overall level of accountability and, to some extent, legislation. For students with the most complex needs or in the most adverse situations, it is likely that schools will keep detailed information about the needs assessment results, dates of staff engagement with students and parents and the outcomes of these meetings. This is because such information might feed into a written Individual Education Plan, a school-based dropout or education support plan, or a family or child plan coordinated by a social worker external to the school.

In **Serbia**, the EWS pilot developed questionnaires for students measuring academic self-perception and aspiration, attitudes towards teachers and the school, motivation and self-regulation. Students at risk of dropout also completed a questionnaire (administered by the school psychologist) on their perceptions of how highly teachers accepted them and of overall well-being at school. Homeroom teachers organized meetings with students at risk of dropping out and their parents to better understand their situation and discuss ways forward. Information was then analysed by the School Dropout Prevention Team to inform the development of a Student Dropout Prevention Plan.

Source: Jovanović et al., 2016.

2.4 Step 4: Implementation of response measures and monitoring

The purpose of the EWS is to identify appropriate response interventions to support students' retention in school, as well as their performance and well-being. Following the needs assessment, schools choose and implement measures to prevent dropout. In Step 4, schools:

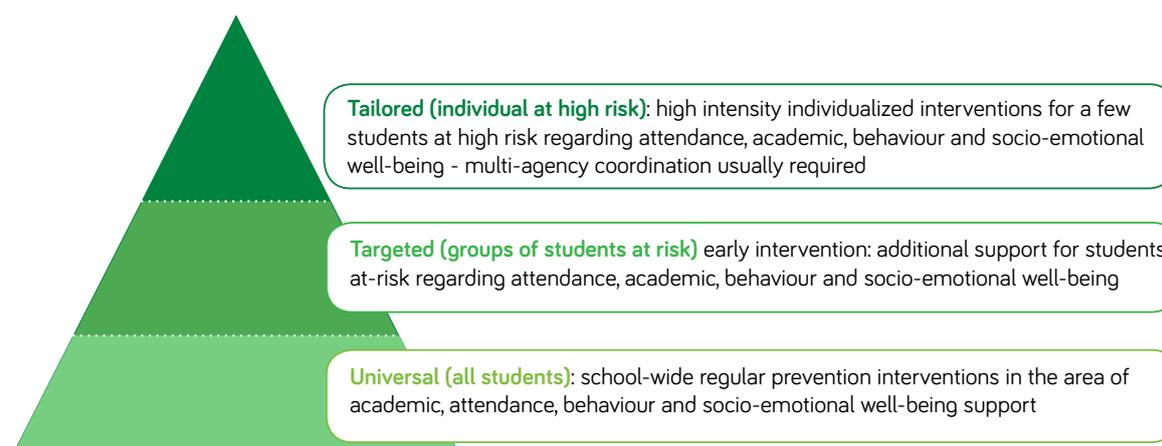
- plan interventions and measures responding to the varied needs of students at risk
- implement and coordinate these interventions
- refer cases to external services and work together with a multi-disciplinary teams and case managers to support children when relevant and appropriate
- monitor students' progress and review measures accordingly.

Questions to think about in Step 4

To what extent do interventions for students at risk vary from our regular school interventions?

Many countries have adopted a three-tier approach to characterize their response interventions: **universal, targeted and tailored**, as described in Figure 2.



Figure 2. The three tiers of dropout prevention

Source: Adapted from Ryan and Brattman (2012), Heppen (2010), National Educational Welfare Board (n.d.) and UNICEF (2017)

If possible, schools should embed dropout prevention in the regular practices that address all students. These are less costly than targeted or tailored interventions and include automatic notification of unauthorised absences to parents and children on the day they are absent, school attendance policies, learning support in the classroom for low-achievers, anti-bullying policies, participation of students in school management and extra-curricular activities. For some groups of students, **targeted** measures are required, such as additional classes for low-achievers, mentoring, or parent-student-school contracts. For students facing the most complex situations, **tailored** individual and intensive support is necessary, such as one-to-one additional teaching, an individual student plan supported by multi-disciplinary teams, case conferences or access to multiple support services, within and outside school.

What interventions are likely to best address the needs of students at risk in our school? A generic, non-exhaustive list of dropout prevention and early intervention measures is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Options for intervention

Risk factors	Examples of interventions
Absenteeism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor absenteeism and tardiness • SMS/calls to notify parents and students when an absence occurs • Explain attendance rules to parents and students • ‘Welcome back’ strategies for absent students • Home visits • Home-school liaison officers and Roma/community assistants • Student-parent-school attendance contract • Free or concessionary school transport

<p>Behaviour</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers greeting, praising, caring and listening to students • Positive relationships between teachers and students • Positive school climate • Discipline policies and procedures for responding to discipline issues • Conveying expectations for students' attitude/behaviour to parents and students • Meetings with parents • Extra-curricular activities, including sports • Mentoring schemes, whether peer mentoring or adult mentoring • Peer education/mediation programmes • Skills training: including communication and conflict resolution through curriculum, extra-curricular and peer activities • Weekly/daily behaviour monitoring • Student-parent-school behaviour contract • Guidance and counselling • Referral to external services, such as health, protection or social services
<p>Academic performance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High expectations for all students • Involvement of students in devising, planning and monitoring their own learning • Differentiated pedagogy and individualized learning in the classroom • Weekly monitoring of learning progress by teachers • Language classes • Additional classes (remedial) or small-group learning support • Catch-up classes, Summer classes, extra support around examinations • Skills training: learning to learn, self-management, etc. • Academic school transition plans before and after an education cycle • Homework clubs and other after-class provision, whether school or community-based • Working with parents on family learning activities • Career guidance • Individual Learning Plan or Individual Education Plan
<p>Other risk factors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free school meals/breakfasts • Free textbooks • Information to parents on existing allowances, cash transfers and social benefits • Information to parents and students on scholarship opportunities • Fundraising activities for very poor students for clothes, school supplies, etc. • Skills training: communication, negotiation, goal setting, etc. through curriculum, extra-curricular and peer activities • Sexual and reproductive health activities for adolescent girls and boys, whether as part of the curriculum, peer activities or extra-curricular activities • Targeted support for adolescent girls, particularly pregnant girls and young mothers, and for young fathers • Information for parents and students on social services, community-based services (including NGOs) and how to obtain identity documents and other key paperwork • Referral to social services / police for child protection concerns • Referral to social services for external child and family support services

How should we coordinate dropout prevention interventions? Early and intensive interventions are most effective when they are timely, relevant to the need of the students, coordinated and empowering. To this end, many countries have developed planning systems to organize interventions and monitor their impact on students. Planning is informed by the needs assessment, which gathers information on issues to be improved and the students' strengths and interests. Planning can be very light, such as simply linking the student to a specific support programme in the school, or more developed, such as drawing up a written plan, with the participation of the student, their family and school staff, setting out agreed objectives, measures, responsibilities and timeline.

In general, a school staff member takes responsibility for **case management**: coordinating the planned interventions and keeping case notes, including records of activities and the progress made. When social services are engaged with a student or their family, dropout prevention activities undertaken by schools will be coordinated with other agencies and services.

Who should be involved in dropout prevention and response activities in our school? All school staff should be aware of effective dropout prevention and response activities, particularly around attendance monitoring. They should also know how to support student learning, engagement and well-being and how to engage constructively with parents. Homeroom teachers play a critical role in monitoring students at risk of dropping out, while many school staff (management, auxiliary staff and support staff) will also be engaged in mentoring students, providing additional learning opportunities, organizing extra-curricular activities, liaising with parents, and coordinating with local authorities, external professionals and services, whether public, private or NGO-based. The breadth and depth of activities might be constrained by legislation (e.g. Are teachers allowed to conduct home visits? Are schools a statutory member of multi-disciplinary teams supporting children and families in difficult life circumstances?), but schools can be creative and resourceful where systems offer little clarity over roles and responsibilities of various professionals or clear accountability lines for children.

In some instances, external services will be involved, such as social and care services, Roma mediators, youth workers, NGOs, community members, local entrepreneurs and community associations. The diversity of student needs and situations requires creativity and flexibility in what measures are to be implemented and by whom.

When should our school involve – or refer cases to – authorities or external services? Schools have a responsibility to ensure education retention. In some situations, however, preventing dropout is beyond the capacity of school staff alone as students and their families may require support that schools cannot provide, whether economic, social or psychological. In such cases, education authorities, local authorities and professionals from other services might need to be involved. For example, schools in most countries have a duty to refer cases of students at risk of harm, such as neglect, abuse or violence, to the police or social services. In many countries, schools can also refer students and their families to social or health services. It is critical that schools understand when and where to refer students, so that situations do not escalate and students' needs are addressed in a timely manner. Beyond referral, more systematic cooperation between the school and external services (health, social work, police) through sharing information, conducting joint visits, or case conferencing can help provide more comprehensive support to children and their families.

In **Serbia**, an Individual Dropout Prevention Plan was developed for students identified at high risk of dropping out, based on a needs assessment conducted by homeroom teachers and a dropout prevention team. Each plan included tailored individual interventions to help the student remain in school and was monitored throughout the school year. Schools were very creative in their response interventions, which ranged from engaging students in peer-tutoring, fundraising activities and linking students at risk of dropping out with local NGOs and community associations to liaising with local self-governments and Centres for Social Work to help families access housing and social assistance, conducting remedial classes for low performing students and improving communication and discussions with students and their parents. *Source: Jovanović et al., 2016.*

In the **Netherlands**, every school has a Care Team, comprising teachers, youth care professionals, social workers, police officers and other professionals depending on the specific contexts and situations. Care Teams have a mandate to identify and address problems that might jeopardize a student's retention and completion of education. Care Teams liaise with the Youth Care Office (youth services) and the Education Welfare Officers of municipalities. *Source: Ministry of Justice, Netherlands, Presentation during UNICEF Study Tour on Early School Leaving in The Hague, 2014.*

In **England**, schools have three duties. First, to report cases of students at risk of neglect, abuse and violence to local authorities. Second, to refer students absent for 10 days without a valid reason to Education Welfare Officers under the Children Missing Education policy. And third, to refer students to Education Welfare Officers when attendance drops below 80-85 percent. Schools can also refer students and their families to an external multi-disciplinary team that can provide coordinated external support and services (Early Help Hub), through a case management approach. Schools also work closely with social workers when students have a Child Protection Plan or when they are part of the care system (social and foster care). *Source: Cambridgeshire County Council (2017)*

2.5 Step 5: Evaluation and learning

Evaluating the EWS and learning lessons about what works and what could be improved are key to improving its effectiveness and impact on students at risk of dropping out and on school practices more broadly. In Step 5, schools:

- evaluate the relevance of indicators, efficiency of EWS processes and tools, effectiveness of response interventions and the impact on students, parents, teachers and school practices and ethos
- engage all school stakeholders in review and evaluation activities, including teachers, students, parents, managers and external stakeholders
- review and improve EWS indicators, processes and response interventions based on evidence
- share learning with other schools, education and local authorities and other agencies.

Questions to think about in Step 5

What tools can our school use to review the EWS? Schools can collect and analyse quantitative data over time, such as data on dropout, absenteeism and learning outcomes for students at risk of dropping out and other students. They can also collect quantitative data through survey questionnaires and qualitative data through focus group discussions with students, teachers, managers, parents and external stakeholders.

Schools should also maximize opportunities to have discussions with students who have dropped out and their families to hear their views on the reasons for dropout. While a small school team can work on gathering the data, findings can be discussed, and recommendations formulated, in a bigger forum. Evidence from the EWS review can be shared during external school evaluations and inspections.

What questions should we answer when reviewing our EWS?

Review questions could include the following:

- Were students at risk of dropping out picked up sufficiently early by the EWS?
- What was the profile of early school leavers who were not identified by the EWS?
- How can this information help us fine-tune the indicators used in the EWS and improve the ability of staff to recognise signs of potential dropout?
- Are there common characteristics among the students who are dropping out or among the reasons for their dropout?
- What interventions have been most successful to prevent dropout and increase attendance rates, and for whom?
- What impact have the various interventions had on the students at risk of dropout in terms of attendance, learning and socio-emotional wellbeing?
- What are the views of parents and students, their level of satisfaction and recommendations to improve school dropout prevention strategies?
- What are the views of teachers, support staff and managers on their level of satisfaction and recommendations to improve the EWS process and school dropout prevention strategies?
- What are the views and recommendations of external services and education authorities on improving the EWS?
- What do we need to change at each step of the EWS to make it more effective?

3 The role of education authorities in EWS

Education authorities have a major role to play in dropout prevention, including supporting schools in the establishment of EWSs. Most specifically, education authorities can take the following steps.

- Share information on dropout factors, prevention and response across the education system.
- Develop dropout prevention plans at national or local levels, to which EWSs could contribute.
- Build capacities of all education stakeholders (authorities and schools) on dropout prevention and response, data analysis and evidence-based decision-making, planning around individual needs of students and constructive communication with students and parents.
- Advocate for the creation of school support staff posts where they do not exist (school-based social workers, school psychologists, school social-pedagogues...) and ensure that these professionals are appropriately trained and equipped with the knowledge, skills and tools to work constructively with students at high risk of dropping out and their families.
- Encourage schools to embrace reflective and monitoring practices.
- Create an environment within which schools do not fear sanctions when attendance and performance rates are low despite their real efforts to improve such rates.

- Convey the usefulness of an EWS approach not only as a tool for dropout prevention but also as a general management tool for schools to curb student absenteeism, improve learning and improve students' well-being more broadly.
- Encourage and reward schools' efforts in dropout prevention and response.
- Include dropout prevention and response in inspection and external evaluation frameworks.
- Conduct research on dropout prevention and response at national, local and school level.
- Facilitate learning exchanges between schools and districts, collect good practices and disseminate them widely.
- Advocate for greater coordination and clearer accountability lines across services and systems so that schools can fully play their role in supporting students who have dropped out or are at high risk of dropping out.

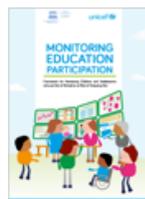


4 Annex: Useful resources

UNICEF-supported resources:



UNICEF, *Improving Education Participation. Policy and Practice Pointers for Enrolling All Children and Adolescents in School and Preventing Dropout*. UNICEF Series on Education Participation and Dropout Prevention, Volume 2. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, February 2017.



UNICEF and UIS, *Monitoring Education Participation: Framework for Monitoring Children and Adolescents who are Out of School or at Risk of Dropping Out*. UNICEF Series on Education Participation and Dropout Prevention, Vol I. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2016.



Jovanović, et al., *How to be a caring school? A study on the Effects of Prevention and Intervention Measures for Preventing the Dropout of Students from the Education System of the Republic of Serbia*, Belgrade: UNICEF, Centre for Education Policy, Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, 2016. <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/HowToBeACaringSchool.pdf>



Veselinović et al, *Handbook for planning, implementing and monitoring of measures to prevent students from dropping out*, Belgrade: UNICEF, Centre for Education Policy, Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, 2016. <http://www.cep.edu.rs/publications/handbook-for-planning-implementing-and-monitoring-of-measures-to-prevent-students-from-dropping-out/69> (in Serbian).



Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Kosovo, *Equity in Education for All: Manual for School Prevention and Response Teams Towards Abandonment and Non-Registration in Compulsory Education*, 2014. <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/12/manual-for-school-prevention-and-response-1.pdf>



IZHA, UNICEF, Albanian Social Services Association and Ministry of Education and Sports, *All Children in School! Ensuring regular attendance and completion of basic education for every child: School Training Manual on Early Warning System for Dropout Prevention*, 2016. <http://izha.edu.al/new/2017/03/20/manuali-i-braktisjes-se-shkolles-2/> (in Albanian)



UNICEF, *Children out of school in Kyrgyzstan. Guidelines for working with children who do not attend school*, 2016. <https://www.unicef.org/kyrgyzstan/ru/Отчеты/дети-вне-обучения-в-школах-кыргызстана> (in Russian)
<https://www.unicef.org/kyrgyzstan/ky/Отчеттор/кыргызстандагы-мектепке-барбай-калган-балдар> (in Kyrgyz)

Other resources:

European Commission Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving, *Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support*. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving, November 2013. Brussels: European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/experts-groups/2011-2013/esl/esl-group-report_en.pdf

Mac Iver, Martha Abele, and Douglas J. Mac Iver, *Beyond the indicators: An integrated school-level approach to dropout prevention*. Arlington, VA: The Mid-Atlantic Equity Center, The George Washington University Center for Equity and Excellence in Education, 2009. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED539776.pdf>

Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving, *Early warning systems in Europe: practice, methods and lessons*, Brussels: European Commission Education and Culture DG- ICF GHK, n.d. http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/experts-groups/2011-2013/esl/europe-warning-systems_en.pdf

Victoria State Government Education and Training, Student Mapping Tool. Last updated in September 2017, n.d. Last accessed on 6 June, 2018. <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/careers/Pages/smt.aspx>

www.attendanceworks.org – Advancing Student Success by Reducing Chronic Absence.

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Heppen, Jessica, B., *Using Early Warning Systems for Progress Monitoring and Dropout Prevention*. Southeast Comprehensive Center RTI Summit, 2010.

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Ryan, Claire, and Marian Brattman, 'Workshop Two: It takes a village to raise a child – cross-sectoral and local co-operation'. The School Completion Programme in Ireland. Early School Leaving EU Conference, Brussels, March 2012.

Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving, *Early warning systems in Europe: practice, methods and lessons*, Brussels: European Commission Education and Culture DG- ICF GHK, n.d.

UNICEF, *Improving Education Participation. Policy and Practice Pointers for Enrolling All Children and Adolescents in School and Preventing Dropout*. UNICEF Series on Education Participation and Dropout Prevention, Volume 2. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, February 2017.

UNICEF and UIS, *Monitoring Education Participation: Framework for Monitoring Children and Adolescents who are Out of School or at Risk of Dropping Out*. UNICEF Series on Education Participation and Dropout Prevention, Vol I. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2016.

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