

Meeting the Nation's High School Graduation Challenge

U.S. Army National Education Conference
September 2009

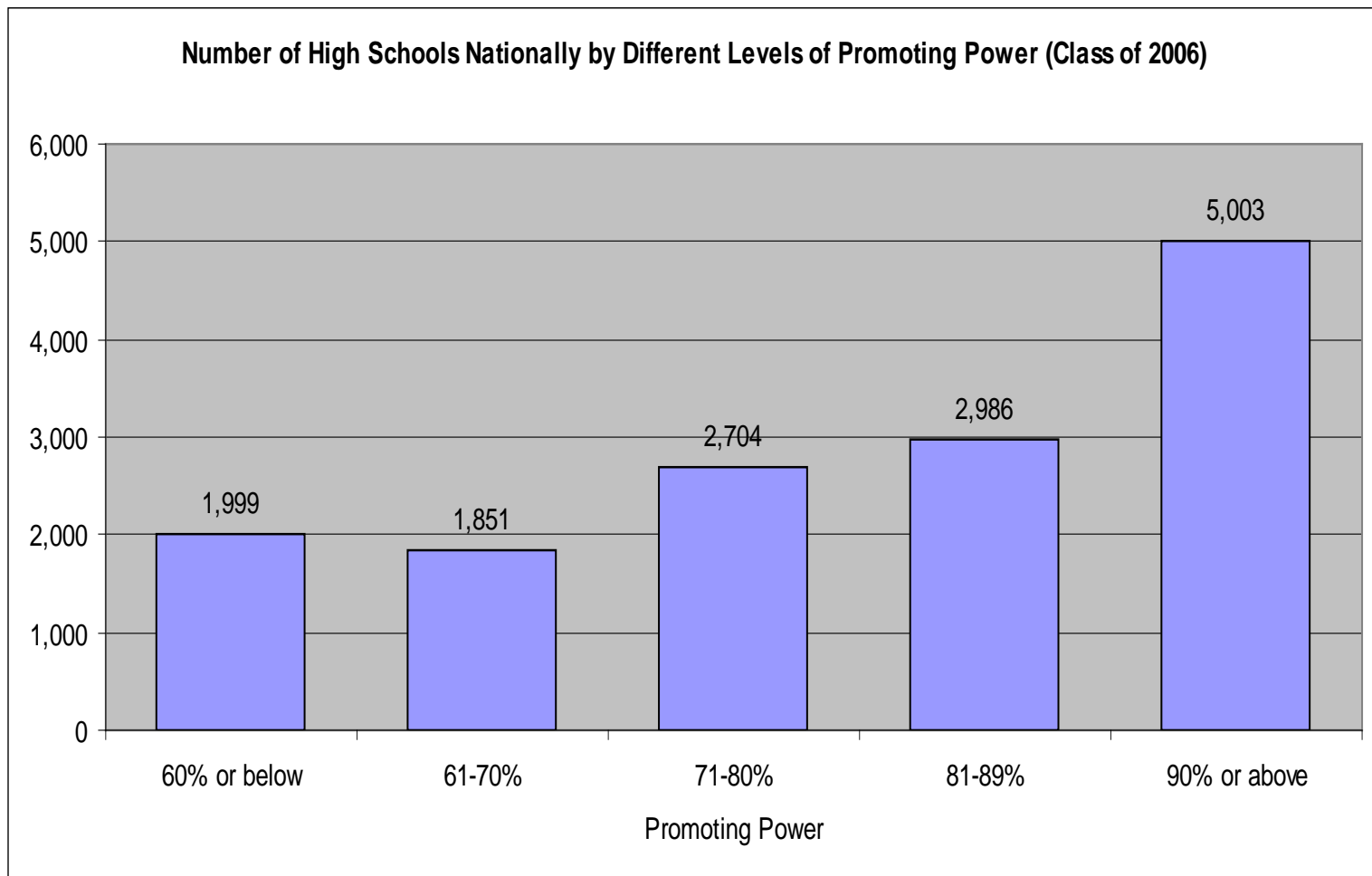
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President Obama has
challenged the nation to
eliminate dropping out
as an option

How then does the dropout
crisis end?

We know where the problem
is concentrated

The nation's dropout crisis is concentrated in 15% of high schools where every year more than one third of students do not graduate



We know where the nation's low graduation rate high schools are located

- About half are in the nation's cities
- The other half are throughout the South and Southwest in rural low-wealth counties and urban fringe
- Every state has one
- 25% are in single high school districts

We have insight into why
these high schools have
low graduation rates

We observed dropping out to be a mechanical process in these high schools

- ❖ Students enter high school with below-grade-level skills and/or poor attendance habits or struggle with the transition to high school
- ❖ 50% or more of students may miss 20 or more days of the 9th grade. Up to one-third may miss 10 of the first 30 days
- ❖ More than half fail two or more and some fail nearly all of their first-semester courses.
- ❖ One-quarter to one-half do not earn enough credits to be promoted to 10th grade
- ❖ They repeat 9th grade and fail again
- ❖ They become over-age for grade with few credits and see little chance of succeeding. They dropout, perhaps after a brief transfer to another school

These high schools are generally
over-challenged and under-resourced
for the degree of educational difficulty
they face

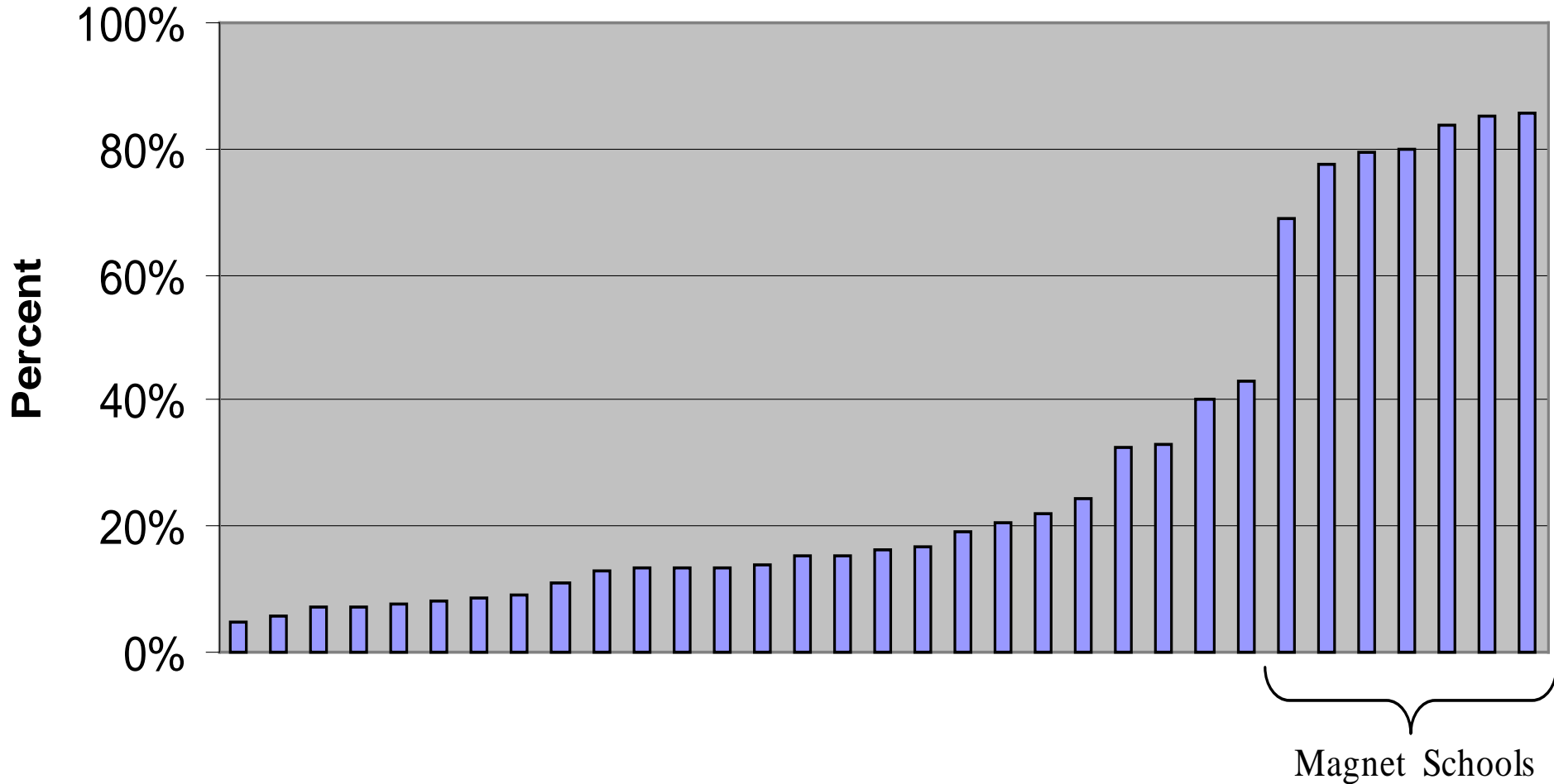
Philadelphia Case Study:

The Educational Challenge of the Ninth Grade-
High Poverty Neighborhood High Schools

vs.

Selective Admission Magnets

Percentage of 9th Graders who are On-Age, First Time Freshmen with 80%+ Attendance in 8th Grade and Math and Reading Skills at the 7th Grade Level or Higher by High School



Under-resourced

- Although they educate almost exclusively low-income students, less than half the nation's low-graduation rate high schools receive federal Title 1 funds.
- In the main, they receive no enhanced staffing models to meet their high level of educational challenge.
- Districts increase high school class size to pay for elementary class size reduction
- Students sometimes must make do with class sets of textbooks
- Latino students in particular attend large weak Promoting Power high schools with high teacher student ratios.
- The 9th grade in a non-selective, high-poverty, low-performing high school is not generally viewed as a good place to teach, so it has higher share of vacancies, long term subs, inexperienced teachers, teacher mobility and absence.

We know why most students
drop out of school

Four main types of dropouts

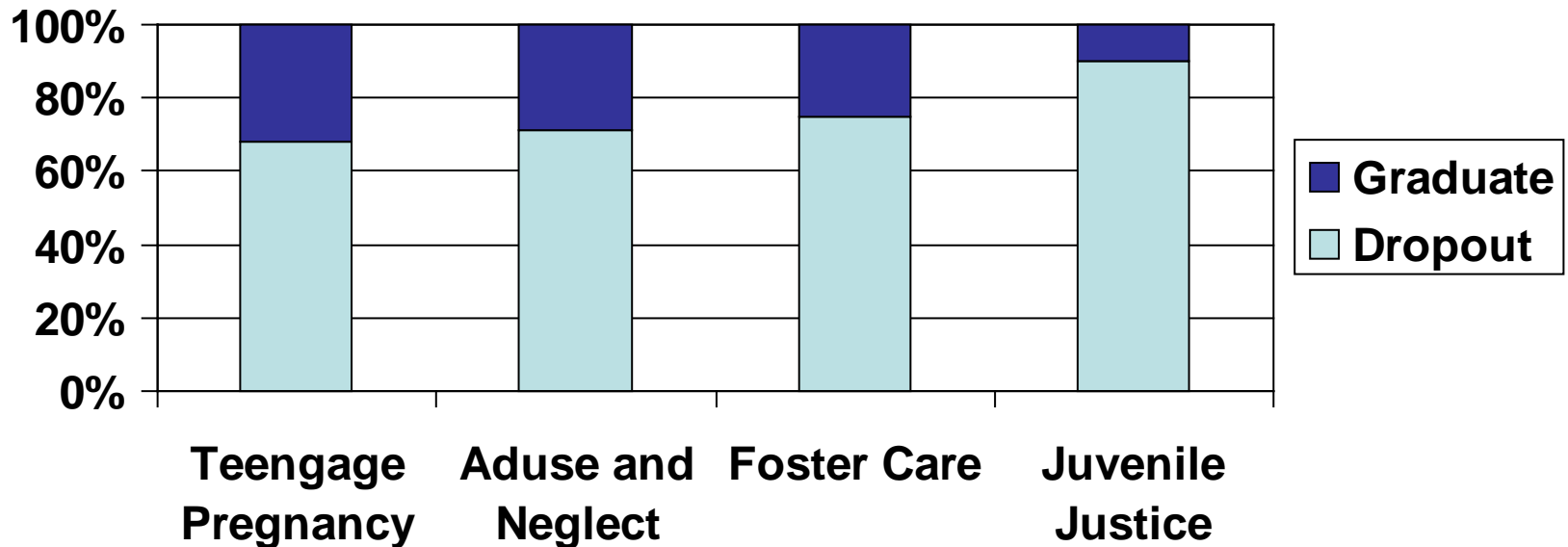
- Life events (forces outside of school cause students to dropout)
- Fade Outs (students do OK in school but stop seeing a reason for staying)
- Push Outs (students who are or perceived to be detrimental to others in the school)
- Failing in school, schools failing students

Life Events

- Often have very low graduation rates
- Do not typically constitute the majority of dropouts
- Need second-chance opportunities and enhanced social supports to overcome life event

In large cities the social safety net is not working

**Dropout and Graduation Rates for Philadelphia
Students Involved with Social Service Agencies-
Class of 2000**



Fade Outs

- Not easy to predict but don't constitute the majority of dropouts
- Sometimes leave as late as the 12th grade only a few credits shy of graduation
- Often regret dropping out soon after they do. Many call it the worst decision of their life.
- Substantial numbers try to re-enter educational system
- Often need rapid credit acquisition opportunities linked with work opportunities

Push Outs

- Numbers vary by place and time
- Often dependent on disposition and effort of assistant principals
- In most respects they are failing-to-succeed students who are given a shove

Failing-to-succeed in school

- In high-poverty environments typically constitute the majority of dropouts
- Are easily identifiable using data routinely collected by schools
- Can be identified at key junctures of secondary school when their odds for success are about to take a turn for the worse
- Often persist in school for a long time before dropping out, despite years of struggles

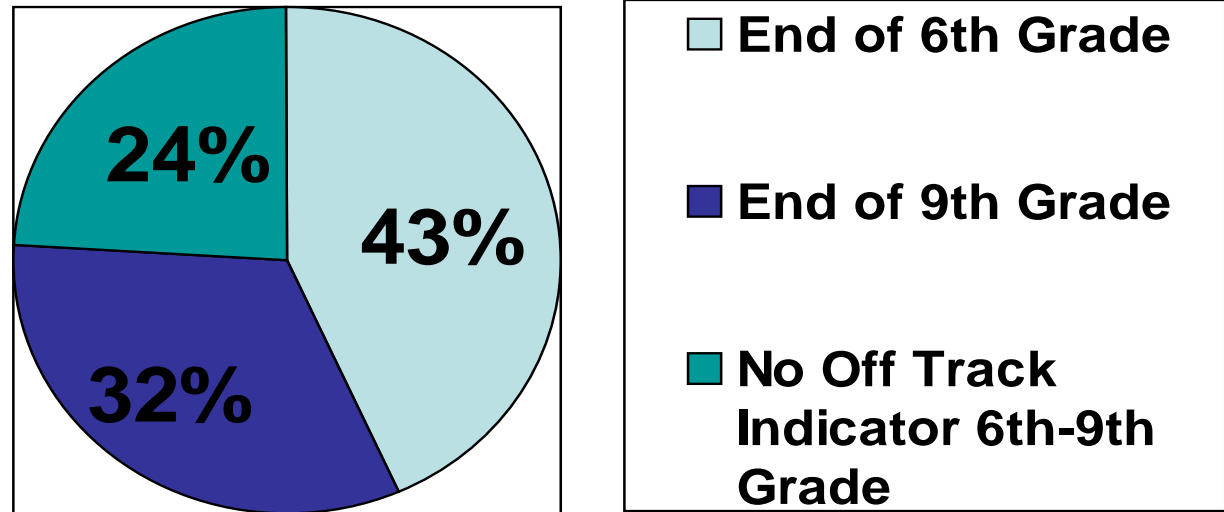
As a result,
we know which students
(absent sustained intervention)
will not graduate

Major Finding

- Students in high-poverty school districts who successfully navigate grades 6 to 10 on time and on track, by and large, graduate from high school (75% or higher grad rates)
- Students in high-poverty school districts who struggle and become disengaged in the early secondary grades and, in particular, those who have an unsuccessful 6th and/or 9th grade transition do not graduate (20% or less grad rates)

In high-poverty school districts,
75% of eventual dropouts can be
identified between 6th and 9th grades

**Percent of Dropouts That Can Be
Identified between the 6th and 9th
grade-Boston Class of 2003**



We know
the warning signs
to look for

Students are knocked off course
in the early secondary grades
by the A,B,Cs

Attendance

Behavior

Course Failure

Attendance

- Across multiple school districts the critical threshold varied from attending school less than 80% of the time to attending less than 90% of the time
- This indicates that the critical factor may not be total days missed but being in the bottom of the attendance distribution

Behavior

- Out-of-school suspensions were highly predictive
- But so was sustained mild misbehavior, e.g. not completing assignments, not paying attention, acting out in class.
- Many more students received poor final behavior grades for mild misbehavior than were suspended -- 1000s compared to 100s.

Course Failure

- Students who fail math, English or any two courses in 6th-9th grade are in trouble
- In 6th grade few students fail both math and English. In 9th grade many students fail math and English
- 85% of 6th-graders who failed English and 75% of those who failed math in Philadelphia also received a poor final behavior mark and/or attended less than 80% of the time
- Course failure is a better predictor of graduation outcomes than test scores
- Some students do fine in 6-8th grade but fall off track in 9th grade

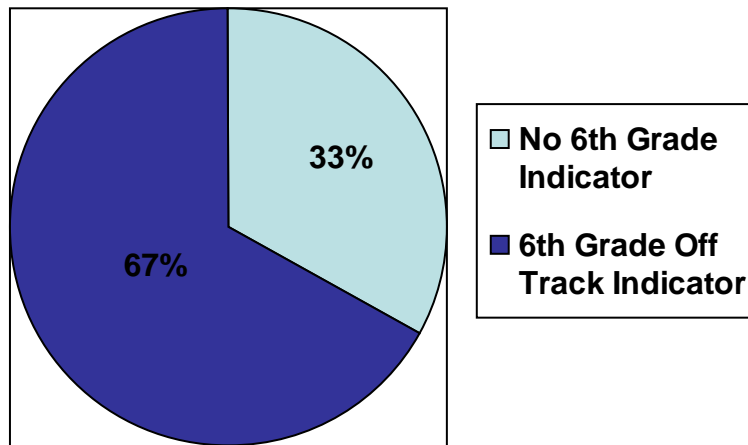
It is student behaviors
in the early secondary grades
in high-poverty environments
not student characteristics
that have predictive power

- When we control for attendance, behavior, and course performance, being over-age, in special education, ELL or any demographic characteristic (i.e. race and gender) are not significant or effective predictors

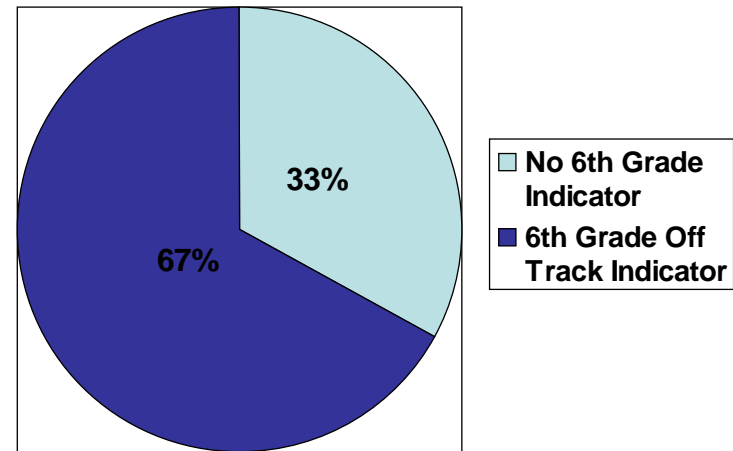
We know
the cost of inaction
is high

School disengagement precedes involvement with the juvenile justice system and teenage pregnancy

Males Incarcerated in High School-Philadelphia



Females Who Give Birth in High School-Philadelphia



What can be done?
In practice

Effective interventions
and proven models exist

What we face is the giant
engineering challenge of getting
the right interventions
to the right students
at the right time
with the required intensity

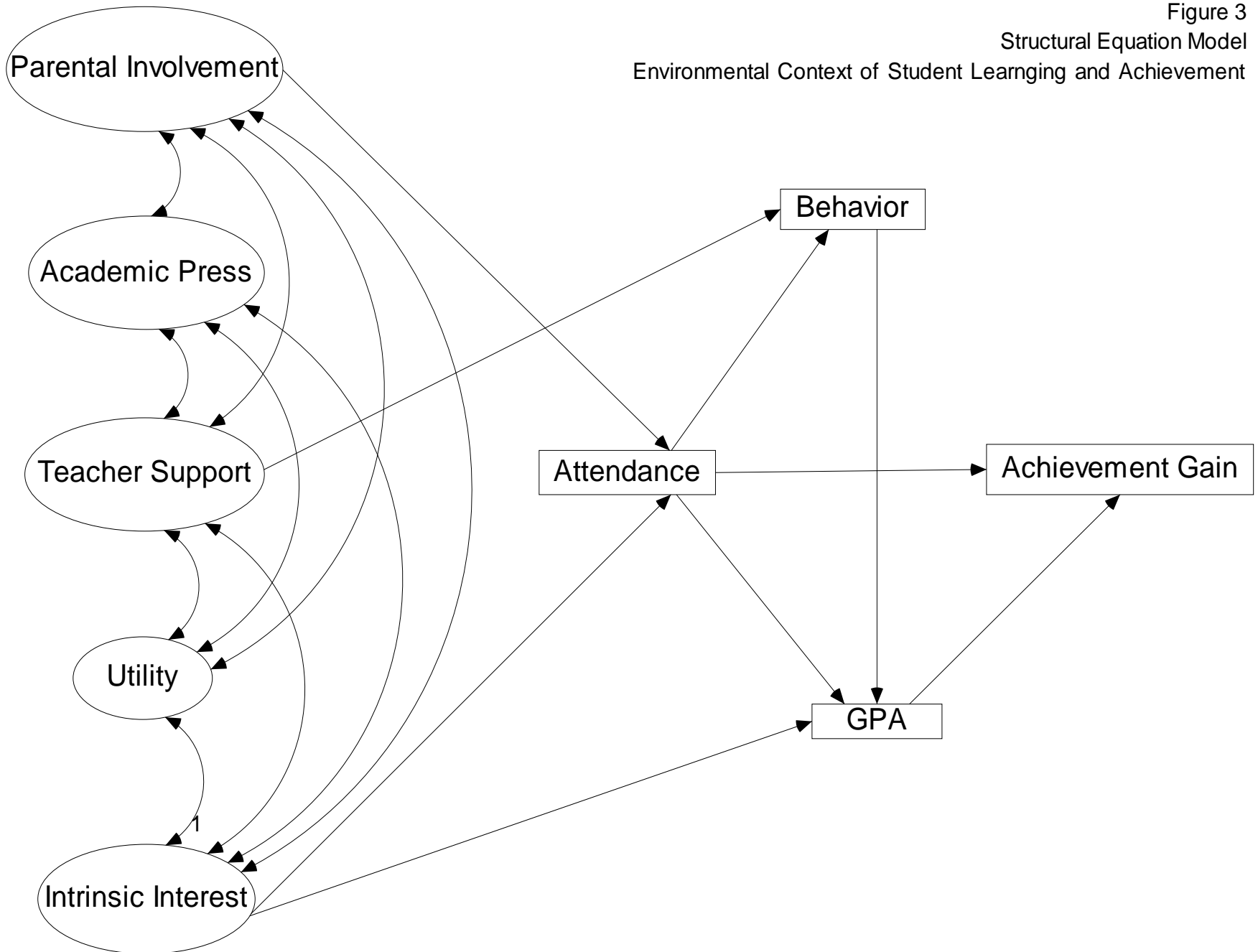
Three steps toward
achieving this

Step 1

Comprehensive, systematic and sustained whole-school reforms that address attendance, behavior, and course performance

- Limited reforms or partial implementation will lead to limited or partial success

Figure 3
Structural Equation Model
Environmental Context of Student Learning and Achievement



At each transition point, consider academic and social needs

- Middle Grades-Intermediate academic skills (reading comprehension and fluency, transition from arithmetic to mathematics) and a need for adventure and camaraderie
- High School-Transition to adult behaviors and mind set and a path to college and career readiness, as well as the right extra help for students with below-grade-level skills

Step 2

Link early warning systems to tiered interventions

- Focus on effective intervention, not just identification
- Need to be able to respond to the first signs that a student is falling off track
- Systematically apply school-wide preventive, targeted and the intensive interventions until students is on-track
- Recognize and build on student strengths
- Provide time, training, and support to teachers
- Match resources to student needs but practice intervention discipline
- Evaluate the effectiveness of interventions
- Remember, you can get started with the data in your school

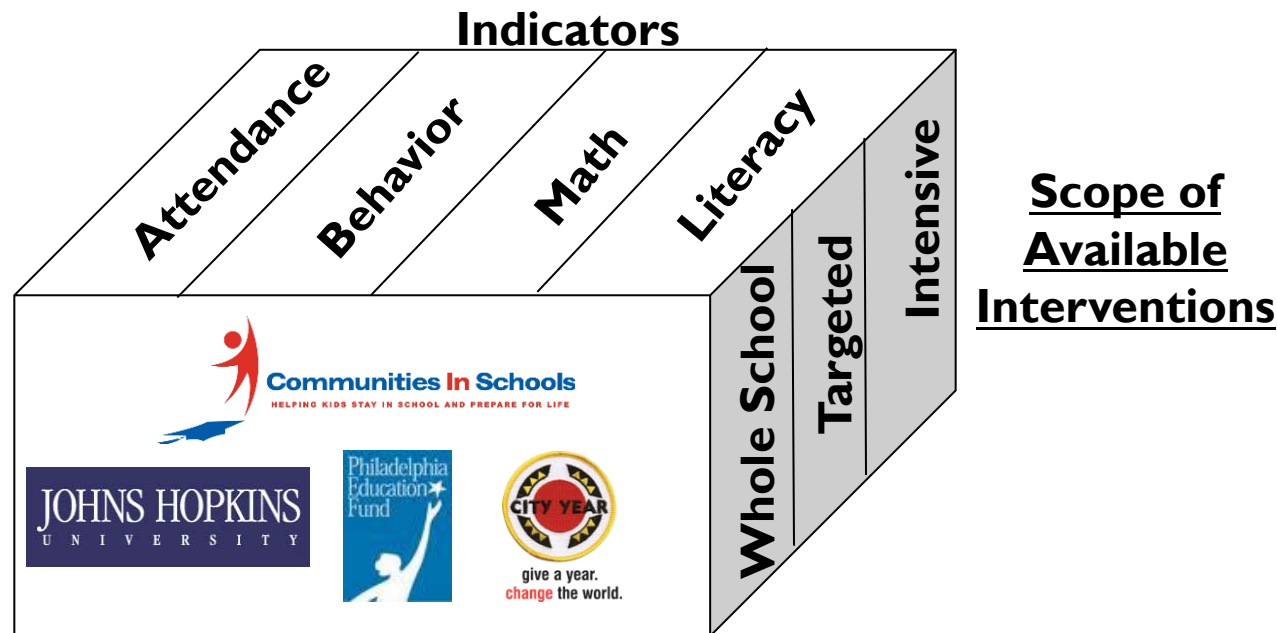
Keeping early secondary students on track to graduation (Grades 6-10)

	Examples of Academic Interventions	Examples of Behavioral/Attendance Interventions
Whole School Preventative	<p>Research and Standards Based Core Curriculum</p> <p>Extended Time Math and Literacy Blocks</p> <p>Benchmark Assessments</p>	<p>Positive Behavior Supports</p> <p>Attendance Campaigns (first absence brings a response/social incentives)</p> <p>Hands On/Minds On Courses (Music, Art, Science, Debate, Sports)</p>
Targeted	<p>Reduced Class Size</p> <p>Elective Replacement Extra Help Courses Linked to Core Course</p>	<p>Behavior/Attendance Team-Problem Solving, Contracts and Daily Monitoring</p> <p>Mentoring</p>
Intensive	Tutoring	Social Service Supports

For Example

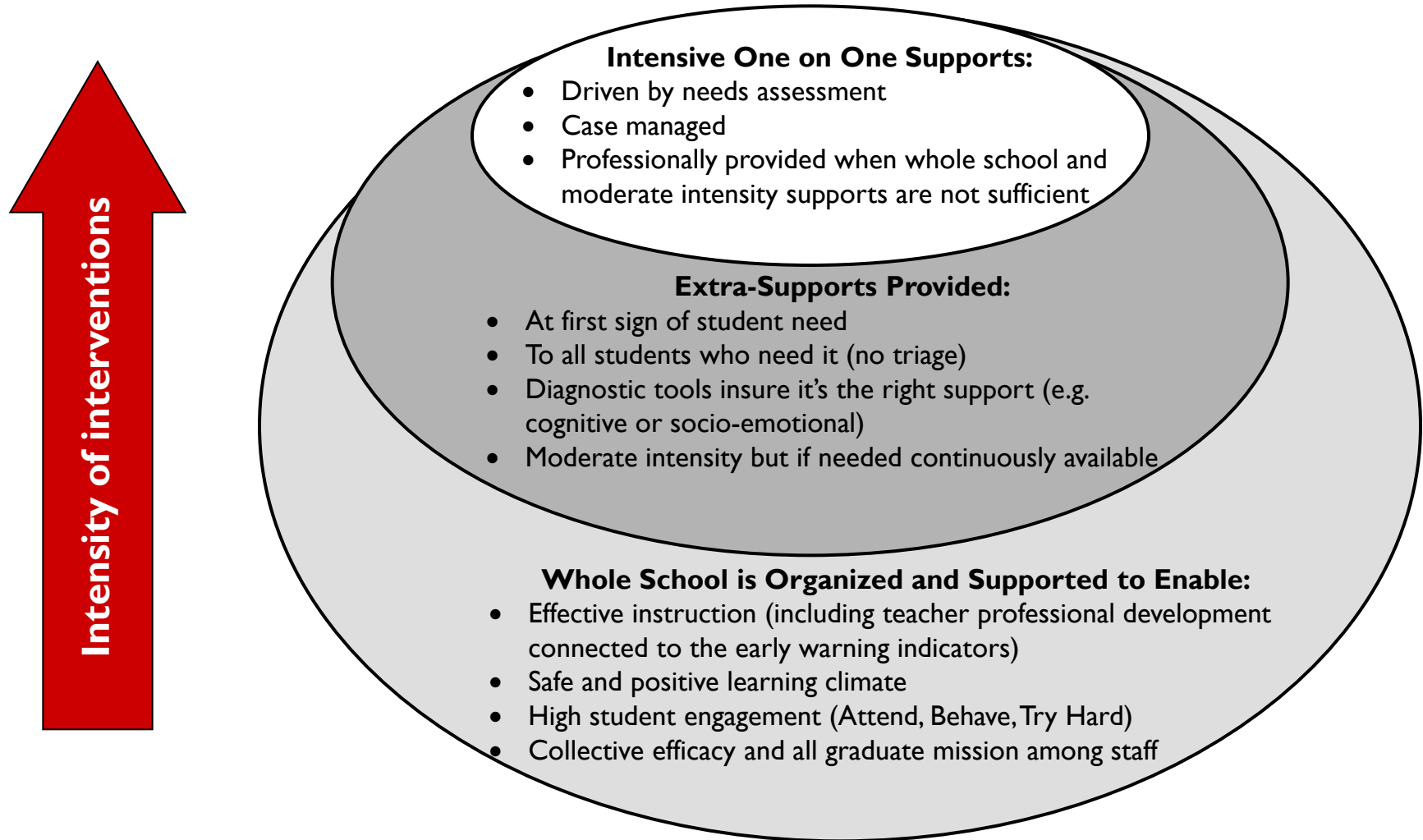
Diplomas Now is designed for the middle and high schools with the greatest number of “off-track” students

1. Combine **whole school reform**, **national service** and **integrated student supports** with an **early warning indicator system** and **on-site coordination** to provide a full school tiered system for supporting all students.
2. Continuous monitoring of student performance related to key early warning indicators
3. Identification of students who are veering off track by indicator
4. Provide the appropriate interventions



Diplomas Now school design

Providing the Right Support to the Right Student at the Right Time



Challenges we need to overcome

- Getting the ratio of skilled adults to students in need right
- Getting teacher buy-in and support for the mission of keeping secondary students on the graduation path
- Strengthening the parent, student, teacher support triangle

Step 3

Involve the Community

- Community specific data analysis to establish how many students drop out, when and why, to enable reforms to be targeted at the right students at the right scale and intensity
- A community compact: multi-year plan to end the dropout crisis
- Community can provide program managers not just incentives
- Work with social service providers to coordinate efforts and make the case for investing social service dollars in school dropout prevention efforts.

What can be done?

In policy

- Need to integrate all youth development efforts toward keeping students on the graduation path ready for college and career
- Need to make sure that sufficient resources-human, social, and financial-are available to provide the scale of student reports required
- Need to make data-based decisions on resource allocation. Need to take degree of educational difficulty into account, that is, the number and concentration of students in need of which supports

How does the dropout crisis end?

- Transform (fix or replace) the 2,000 low-graduation rate high schools and their feeder middle schools
- Implement Early Warning and Intervention Systems-and have a sufficient ratio of skilled and committed adults to students in need
- Put the right Recovery options in place
- Adopt policies that promote graduation for all

Where educators need help and the Army might contribute

- **Teaming:** To succeed, highly challenged middle and high schools need to be organized around teacher teams-teachers helping each other and working collectively to keep all students on the graduation path
- **Distributed Leadership:** Schools need to be organized and led by team leaders, instructional coaches, academy leaders, and school-wide leaders all working as an effective whole. The system needs to be strong enough that it can survive change in personnel and continue to function at a high level
- **After-Action Reports:** When a school fails to reform there is almost no record or analysis as to why. This greatly hinders the development of an on-going knowledge base and leads many schools to repeat the same mistakes.
- **Useful Field Guides:** The wheel is re-invented in education 100 times a day. There is no tradition or mechanism for capturing and spreading effective field practice.

For more information,
visit the Everyone Graduates
Center
at www.every1graduates.org

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