

Implementation Interview: Using Early Warning Systems to Identify and Support Students at Risk of Dropping Out of High School

Purpose and Background

Information gathered during this process is intended to be used formatively by school teams and to help plan future efforts to identify and support students at risk of dropping out of high school. Early warning systems (EWS) refer to data systems or screening practices that use validated indicators for the early identification of students who are at risk of missing key educational milestones or meeting specific academic goals or outcomes (e.g., high school graduation, college readiness). States, districts, school leaders, and staff use validated indicators based on readily available data (drawn from national research or locally validated) to highlight students who may be at risk and to provide information to inform educators' practices and guide students back on track. The *Implementation Interview* and companion *Implementation Rubric: Using Early Warning Systems to Identify and Support Students at Risk of Dropping Out of High School* focus on the use of EWS as a means of identifying students at risk for not graduating from high school.

In North Carolina, the At Risk Report and Diploma Assessment Report available in PowerSchool provides North Carolina schools and districts the capacity to design early warning reports. As a result, PowerSchool and the report users can consider those resources when thinking about EWS within this document. To learn more about these reports, please visit <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/dropout/warning/>.

While the terminology used for this process may vary, within this document, EWS implementation is defined as the a cycle of (a) using EWS data and other data to identify students at risk of dropping out of school and to develop a hypothesis for the underlying root cause; (b) identifying and matching interventions and supports to address schoolwide needs, the needs of groups of students, or the needs of individual students; (c) monitoring student progress and making adaptations to interventions and supports as needed; and (d) continuously reviewing and refining the implementation cycle to ensure that it is successfully supporting students. One example of an EWS implementation framework is the Early Warning Intervention Monitoring System Implement Cycle (EWIMS) developed by American Institutes for Research through the work of the National High School Center. For more information on EWIMS, please visit <http://www.earlywarningsystems.org/resources-tools/implementation-and-research>

To learn more about EWS, please visit www.earlywarningsystems.org.

Structure

The *Implementation Interview* and *Rubric* are based on the structure of the Center on Response to Intervention’s Integrity Rubric (see <http://www.rti4success.org/resource/essential-components-rti-integrity-rubric-and-worksheet>). The implementation rubric comprises seven sections that reflect key aspects of the EWS implementation cycle, as follows:

1. **System Features to Support Readiness and Implementation.** Resources and organizational structures necessary to support, identify, and intervene to support students at risk of dropping out of high school
2. **Data Team and Structure.** Team structure and process in place to review EWS data and other data in order to assign and monitor interventions
3. **EWS Tool Capabilities.** Components and capabilities of the tool (e.g., indicators and thresholds, reports) and maintenance of the tool to support identification of students at risk of dropping out
4. **Review of EWS Data.** Data review process to identify at-risk students, groups of students, or schoolwide patterns, and to explore underlying root causes of risk and develop a hypothesis for intervention and support
5. **Interventions and Supports.** Interventions and supports of varying focus (e.g., attendance, course performance, behavior) and intensity—aligned to address identified root causes of risk—provided to support dropout prevention efforts
6. **Progress Monitoring.** Ongoing and frequent monitoring of student progress across levels of interventions to monitor responsiveness to interventions and supports, and to make adjustments and adaptations as needed
7. **Continuous Improvement.** System for collecting and analyzing data to measure fidelity and effectiveness of EWS implementation

Within each section of the script, there are leading questions for each rating and space for notes, including documents that have been reviewed to guide the ratings. The interview is aligned with the structure and items included in the companion document, *Implementation Rubric: Using Early Warning Systems to Identify and Support Students at Risk of Dropping Out of High School*.

Use and Scoring

Information about school-level implementation may be collected through interviews with school personnel and review of relevant materials (e.g., school implementation plans, meeting notes, data, intervention lists). Recommended participants include those staff members working on dropout prevention and taking part in EWS data reviews. The length of time required for the interview process may vary based on the depth of conversations and the amount of content covered, but it is expected to take between two and three hours. The *Implementation Interview* includes a number of suggested questions and probes, but it is not necessary for all questions to be covered. You may find that all questions are not needed as a result of your context, or that the questions can be simplified based on

responses from participants. To streamline the process, interviewers may find it helpful to review the questions prior to conducting the interview in order to identify and prioritize those questions that are most relevant. You may also find the need to dig deeper into a specific area or to add supplementary questions.

Information collected during the interview may be used in combination with the *Implementation Rubric* to identify strengths and challenges with implementation. The Implementation Rubric provides a 5-point rating scale and descriptions of practices that would score a 1, 3, and 5 for each item. Interviewers (or teams conducting a self-assessment) may also assign the school a rating of 2 or 4 if the information collected suggests the school falls between the rubric descriptions. For example, if the school is performing at a level higher than the rubric describes for a 3 rating but not quite at the level described for a 5, the rating should be a 4 for that item. If the rubric is used as a structured interview or an external review, it can be helpful to have two facilitators, with at least one independent facilitator who has not been involved in the implementation process. Having two people allows one person to focus on asking the questions while the second individual captures notes. Having two facilitators also allows for a check of interrater reliability between the facilitators' ratings. In the event that two facilitators are used, it is important to review how the ratings varied and to discuss the differences.

The goal of the *Implementation Interview* is to create an open dialogue about EWS implementation. The rubric and interview are not intended as a personal evaluation; rather, they can inform the identification of implementation strengths, detect barriers that teams have encountered, and identify areas in need of additional focus or professional development.

Introductory Script for Interviews

[Begin with introductions of facilitators and school staff.] *Today, we're going to talk about dropout prevention and early warning systems (EWS). We will discuss how EWS data are being used to identify students at risk for dropping out of high school and the process for intervening and supporting students based on their identified need(s)—the process described throughout the document as EWS implementation. This is not a personal evaluation; we are here to discuss what's going well, barriers teams have encountered, and how we might support your school and other schools moving forward. For some interview questions, you may want to provide evidence or examples such as procedures manuals, sample intervention or assessment materials, meeting notes, intervention plans, or graphs of student data.*

During the interview, we will take notes and review any materials you would like to share. We also encourage all members of the team here today to contribute responses to interview questions. Do you have any questions about this process? [Pause] Great, let's get started!

School: _____ District: _____ Date: _____

Team Interviewed: _____

Facilitators: _____

| Item | Sample Interview Questions | Comments/Remarks | Ratings |
|--|---|------------------|---|
| <p>1. System Features to Support Readiness and Implementation: Resources and organizational structures necessary to support, identify, and intervene to support students at risk of dropping out of high school</p> | | | |
| <p>Leadership</p> | <p>To what extent are school and district administrators aware of and knowledgeable about what EWS data are and how they can be used to support dropout prevention at your school? Please describe how their support is exemplified.</p> <p>To what extent do the actions taken and decisions made by district administrators support the use of EWS data to support dropout efforts? By school administrators?</p> <p>How have leaders at the school/district level shared the importance of EWS data and EWS implementation? Please provide examples.</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |
| <p>Resources</p> | <p>Are adequate materials, programs, and other budgetary items available to support data review, intervention, and monitoring? Please describe.</p> <p>How do the programs and materials match the needs of the students?</p> <p>Is there adequate time and flexibility within schedules to discuss data, (including EWS data and progress monitoring data) and to provide intervention and support? Please describe.</p> <p>What is the process for monitoring the use of resources?</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |

| Item | Sample Interview Questions | Comments/Remarks | Ratings |
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| Communications With and Involvement of Families and Students | <p>Describe how you communicate EWS data and dropout prevention interventions with families whose children are at risk of dropping out. <i>Probe:</i> methods of communication, frequency.</p> <p>How do you update families on their children’s progress? <i>Probe:</i> methods of communication, frequency.</p> <p>How do you involve families and students in decision-making regarding their children’s dropout risk? Please provide examples.</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |
| Communication With and Involvement of Staff | <p>Are the teachers who work with students at risk of dropping out knowledgeable about EWS data and available interventions?</p> <p>Describe how you keep staff informed of student progress, including changes in intervention, as appropriate.</p> <p>Is time allocated for collaboration? How are various staff involved in supporting students identified as at risk of dropping out?</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |

| Item | Sample Interview Questions | Comments/Remarks | Ratings |
|---------------------------------|--|------------------|---|
| Professional Development | <p>What professional development is provided to support dropout-prevention efforts? <i>Probe</i> specifically around the following: the review of EWS data and other data sources, identification of student needs, provision of interventions, monitoring of student progress and evaluation of the system over time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has the staff been trained on the EWS research and implementation considerations? ▪ Do staff members understand how the tool and reports are intended to be used? <p>How often is refresher or new training provided?</p> <p>How do new teachers learn about the school’s dropout prevention work, including the use of EWS data? What professional development is provided?</p> <p>What ongoing professional development is made available for those who provide targeted and intensive intervention to support dropout prevention?</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |
| Community Partnerships | <p>Are partnerships with community organizations in place to support students at risk of dropping out?</p> <p>If so, please describe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How these partnerships were established and how they are maintained ▪ What student needs or services the partnership covers and whether they cover the breadth of student needs | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |

| Item | Sample Interview Questions | Comments/Remarks | Ratings |
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| <p>2. Data Team and Structure: <i>Team structure and process in place to review EWS data and other data sources in order to assign and monitor interventions</i></p> | | | |
| <p>Team or Appropriate Support Mechanism</p> | <p>Does your school have a designated person (or people) who coordinates EWS implementation? If yes, what percentage of that person’s time is devoted to overseeing and managing EWS/dropout-prevention work?</p> <p>Do you have a team that makes data-based decisions as part of the EWS implementation process?</p> <p><i>If yes:</i></p> <p>Does the team include individuals with various areas of expertise (e.g., technical knowledge of the EWS, diverse knowledge of students in the school, and decision-making authority)?</p> <p>Are roles assigned within the team to facilitate meetings? Do team members have a clear sense of their roles and responsibilities?</p> <p>Do additional staff members participate in the team as appropriate (e.g., family members, community partners)?</p> <p><i>If no:</i></p> <p>Is data review conducted by a single person (e.g., dropout-prevention coordinator, graduation coach) at the school who has access to another support mechanism for problem solving around data-based decision making? Please describe. Is there any communication between this individual and others to inform decisions?</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |

| Item | Sample Interview Questions | Comments/Remarks | Ratings |
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| Regular Meetings | <p>What is the schedule for EWS meetings?</p> <p>How frequently do teams meet to discuss EWS data and risk reports?</p> <p>How are meetings structured? <i>Probe:</i> Are there methods to facilitate conversation and problem solving?</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |
| <p>3. EWS Tool Capabilities: <i>Components and capabilities of the tool (e.g., indicators and thresholds, reports) and maintenance of the tool to support identification of students at risk of dropping out</i></p> | | | |
| EWS Indicators and Thresholds¹ | <p>What indicators and thresholds are used to identify students at risk of dropping out of school?</p> <p>What is the evidence behind the indicators and thresholds selected to identify students at risk for not completing high school?</p> <p>Can staff members involved in EWS implementation articulate the indicators and thresholds? Can they articulate the evidence behind the EWS indicators and thresholds?</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |

¹ **Indicators** capture students' academic performance, behavior, and engagement. They are based on readily available data such as course performance, credits earned, or attendance (e.g., missing 10 percent or 20 percent of instructional time) and are used to identify which students may be at risk of missing a key outcome measure. Indicators are validated through analysis. **Thresholds**, or cut points, are the values at which an indicator predicts that a student is likely or not likely to meet the predefined outcome measure. For example, research suggests that a student who misses 10 percent or more of school days as early as the first 20 days of ninth grade is at risk of dropping out of high school (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). (Definitions from O'Cummings & Therriault, 2015 available at http://www.earlywarningsystems.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/EWS-Lessons-Learned_Final-6-1-15.pdf)

| Item | Sample Interview Questions | Comments/Remarks | Ratings |
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| EWS Tool Capabilities | <p>Does the EWS tool include data for all students?</p> <p>What are the capabilities of the EWS tool? <i>Probe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can you group and sort students? ▪ Can you look at student data across time? ▪ Are interventions incorporated within the EWS? <p>What reports are available? <i>Probe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are student- and school-level reports available? ▪ Are intervention reports available? <p>Do staff members know the capabilities of the EWS tool?</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |
| EWS Tool Maintenance | <p>How are data updated? How frequently? Can you update the data easily to include students who may have transferred into the school?</p> <p>Is the EWS connected to the school/district student information system?</p> <p>Is there a process to review the accuracy of the data?</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |

| Item | Sample Interview Questions | Comments/Remarks | Ratings |
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| EWS Technical Support | <p>Do you have staff members who are knowledgeable about the EWS tool’s technical capabilities and maintenance?</p> <p>How do new members learn about the EWS tool’s technical capabilities and maintenance?</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |
| <p>4. Review of EWS Data: <i>Data review process to identify at-risk students, groups of students, or schoolwide patterns, and to explore the underlying root causes of risk and develop a hypothesis for intervention and support</i></p> | | | |
| EWS Data Review | <p>What is the process for reviewing EWS data? <i>Probe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How are data from the reports (e.g., student- and school-level reports, intervention reports) used to review data? ▪ Do you review students identified as at risk for any indicator? ▪ Do you review data to identify patterns? <i>Probe:</i> individual student, groups of students, school level. ▪ Do you review risk over time? <i>Probe:</i> individual student, groups of students, school level. ▪ Do you look at data across multiple levels, individual, groups of student? ▪ Do you disaggregate data and supports for different subpopulations within your school? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What subgroups? <i>Probe</i> for English language learners, students with disabilities, homeless students, migrant students, Native American/Alaskan Native students. <p>How frequently are data reviewed?</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |

| Item | Sample Interview Questions | Comments/Remarks | Ratings |
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| Data Points to Verify Risk | <p>Do you review other data beyond EWS data before placing a student in interventions and supports?</p> <p>If so, what other types of data do you use? <i>Probe:</i> individual factors, family factors, school factors, community factors.</p> <p>Have you done any review of available data sources and identified potential gaps?</p> <p>What process do you use to look across these data sources and hypothesize the underlying root causes?</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |

| Item | Sample Interview Questions | Comments/Remarks | Ratings |
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| <p>5. Interventions and Supports: <i>Interventions and supports of varying focus (e.g., attendance, course performance, behavior) and intensity—aligned to address identified root causes of risk—provided to support dropout prevention efforts</i></p> | | | |
| <p>Schedules</p> | <p>Describe how your school schedule supports interventions. <i>Probe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How does the schedule reflect additional time for interventions? ▪ Are schedules flexible to allow for changes in intervention and student groupings? Please describe. | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |
| <p>Intervention and Support Selection</p> | <p>To what extent are data used to inform instruction, intervention, and support at all tiers, including the universal level? Please describe.</p> <p>Describe how decisions are made to identify interventions and supports.</p> <p>What data are used to inform those decisions, and how are they used?</p> <p>What criteria and guidelines are used for making decisions (e.g., placement in interventions, movement between intervention levels?) <i>Probe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are these rules documented in writing? ▪ Do they differ by level? By tier? ▪ How do you ensure they are followed with accuracy? | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |

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| Universal Interventions (Tier I) | <p>Describe universal or schoolwide interventions that are provided to support dropout-prevention efforts (academic, behavior, attendance).</p> <p>How were the interventions selected? Were EWS data used to inform the decision?</p> <p>What is the research base for these supports?</p> <p>Have these programs demonstrated efficacy?</p> <p>When selected, how much attention was paid to the research base?</p> <p>How were staff trained to implement the intervention? <i>Probe:</i> Is there opportunity for additional training? How are new staff trained?</p> <p>Is the schoolwide intervention provided consistently across teachers? How do you know?</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |
| Targeted Interventions (Tier II) | <p>Describe the targeted interventions available (academic, behavior, attendance).</p> <p>How were these interventions selected? Were EWS data used to inform the decision?</p> <p>Have these programs demonstrated efficacy with the target populations (e.g., has research shown that the interventions positively impact student achievement)?</p> <p>When a school selected these interventions, how much attention was paid to the research base?</p> <p>Do targeted interventions reflect the variety of student needs? How do you know?</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> |

| Item | Sample Interview Questions | Comments/Remarks | Ratings |
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| | <p>Who provides interventions? What training were they provided in the interventions and supports?</p> <p>Is the dosage and group size for targeted interventions appropriate and delivered as intended?</p> <p>How do you monitor whether the targeted interventions have been delivered as intended?</p> | | <p>Future support needed:</p> |
| <p>Intensive Interventions (Tier III)</p> | <p>Have these programs demonstrated efficacy with the individual students participating (e.g., has research shown that the interventions positively impact student achievement, attendance, behavioral outcomes)?</p> <p>When a school selected these interventions, how much attention was paid to the research base?</p> <p>How is intensive intervention more intensive than targeted interventions (group size, dosage, etc.)?</p> <p>How is intensive intervention aligned to student needs? Are adaptations made based on data when needed to increase intensity or fit?</p> <p>Do individualized interventions reflect the variety of student needs?</p> <p>Who provides interventions? What training were they provided in the interventions and supports?</p> <p>Is the dosage and group size for intensive interventions appropriate and delivered as intended?</p> <p>How do you monitor whether the intensive interventions have been delivered as intended?</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |

| Item | Sample Interview Questions | Comments/Remarks | Ratings |
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| Subgroups | <p>Describe the different subgroups within your school (e.g., students with disabilities, homeless or neglected/delinquent students, migrant students, English language learners, Native American/Alaskan Native students).</p> <p>Do available interventions address the needs of specific subgroups of students?</p> <p>What considerations and efforts have been made to ensure that interventions and data collection take into account different subgroups represented in your school?</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |

| Item | Sample Interview Questions | Comments/Remarks | Ratings |
|---|--|------------------|---|
| <p>6. Progress Monitoring: <i>Ongoing and frequent monitoring of student progress across levels of intervention to monitor responsiveness to interventions and supports, and to make adjustments and adaptations as needed</i></p> | | | |
| <p>Monitoring Progress</p> | <p>Describe the process used for monitoring progress. How often does progress monitoring occur? Does it differ across levels/tiers? If so, how?</p> <p>Does monitoring occur with sufficient frequency to show a trend in progress over time? How many data points are used to make decisions?</p> <p>Are methods for monitoring progress occurring consistently across classrooms, grade levels, within the school? Please describe.</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |
| <p>Progress Monitoring Data</p> | <p>How are progress monitoring data used?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are data graphed? ▪ What decision rules are used to make decisions about continuing, adapting, reassigning, or terminating interventions for individual students, groups of students, or the school as a whole? <p>Are progress monitoring data used to identify gaps in available support and recommendations for intervention changes?</p> <p>Are progress monitoring data used to review the general effectiveness of interventions?</p> <p>How are progress monitoring data shared? With whom? <i>Probe:</i> parents, teachers, and other stakeholders.</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |

| Item | Sample Interview Questions | Comments/Remarks | Ratings |
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| 7. Continuous Improvement: System for collecting and analyzing data to measure fidelity and effectiveness of EWS implementation | | | |
| Assess and Improve | <p>Have you set specific goals for monitoring EWS?</p> <p>Have you developed a process for reviewing EWS implementation?</p> <p>Is time allotted for relevant staff to review the school's EWS implementation and make changes as needed? If so, please describe the data you review and any findings or changes made thus far.</p> | | <p>Rating ① ② ③ ④ ⑤</p> <p>Justification of rating:</p> <p>Future support needed:</p> |