

Keeping Early Secondary Grade Students on the Graduation Path

Findings and Policy Implications

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Major Finding

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

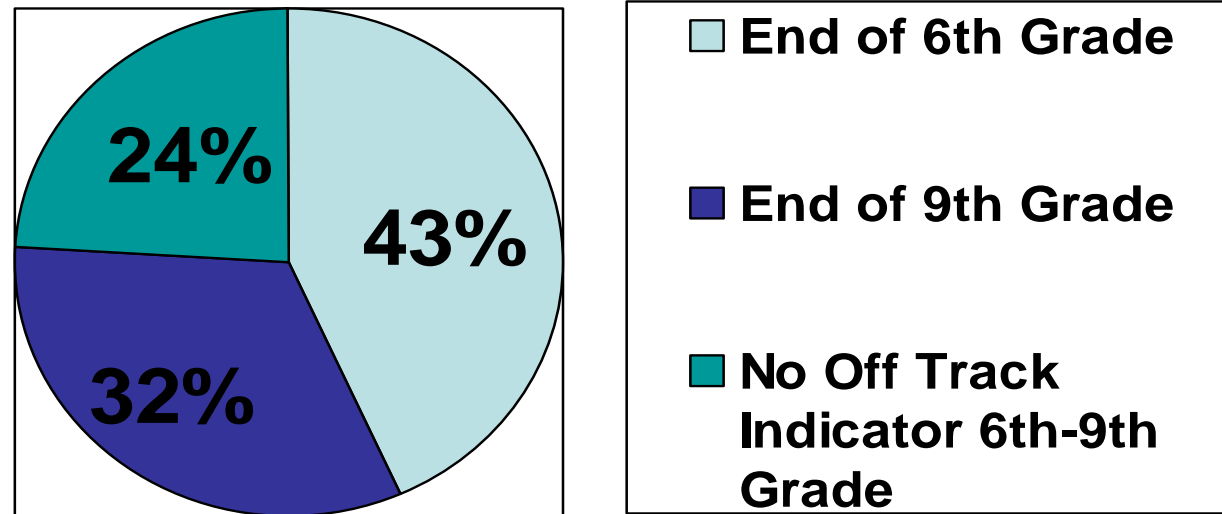
Research Question and Methods

- What is the role of the early secondary grades (grades 6 to 9) in determining the likelihood that a student will graduate?
- To find out we followed cohorts of students from 6th grade through two years past expected graduation time in three large, urban, high poverty school districts

About 40% of Eventual
Dropouts Could be Identified in
the 6th Grade and
75% by 9th Grade

In High Poverty School Districts, 75% of Eventual Dropouts Can be Identified between the 6th and 9th Grade

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



Students are Knocked Off Course in the Early Secondary Grade by the A,B, C's

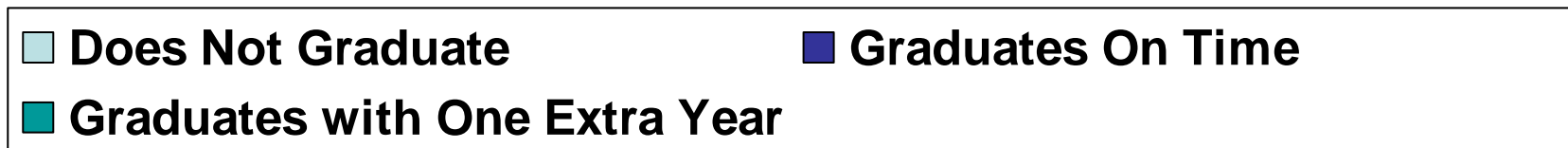
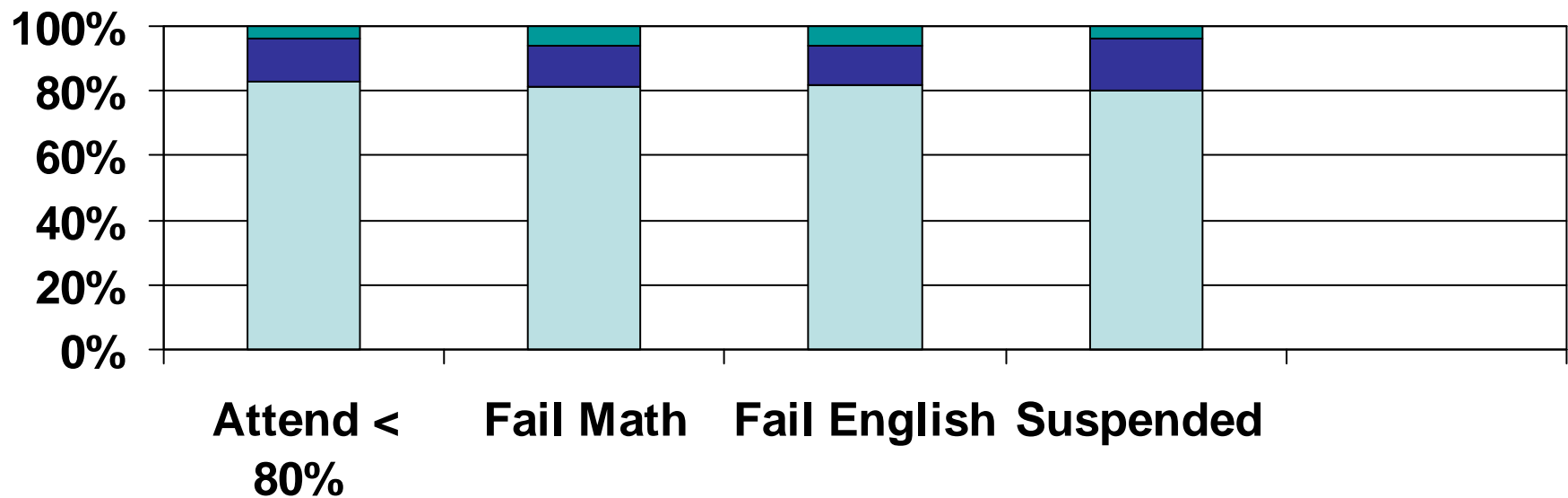
Attendance

Behavior

Course Failure

6th Graders with Poor Attendance, Behavior or Course Failure have Extremely Low Graduation Rates

Graduation Outcomes for Students with 6th Grade Off-Track Indicators-Philadelphia



Attendance

- Across the three 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. receiving a poor final behavior grade in two or more courses
- Many more students received poor final behavior grades than were suspended 1000's compared to 100's.

Course Failure

- Student who fail mathematics, English or any two courses in 6th grade are in trouble
- Few students failed both math and English but those that did almost never graduated
- 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

It's Student Outcomes in the Early Secondary Grades in High Poverty Environments, not Student Characteristics, Which 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

Why Do So Many Students Fall off the Graduation Path in the Early Secondary Grades?

We Have Underestimated The Intensity and Scale of the Educational Challenge in High Poverty Environments

The Onset of Adolescences Combined with Concentrated, Inter- generational Poverty Creates its own Set of Risk Factors

- There are the developmental and cognitive challenges all middle grade schools face - magnified by the freedoms of urban environments and large numbers of students with below grade level academic skills
- There are neighborhood challenges - gangs and criminal enterprises need young adolescent males
- There are the family responsibilities brought on by poverty which increase with adolescence

These Challenges are Met with an Inadequate Educational Response which Makes Matters Worse

- There is the intense concentration of large numbers of students with emotional, social, and academic needs in a sub-set of high poverty middle and high schools
- There is an insufficient number of skilled and intransient adults in these schools and neighborhoods committed to early secondary students' development
- There are often poor physical facilities

As a result, early secondary grade students in high poverty schools begin to disengage from schooling in large numbers and at a rapidly accelerating rate

- Some stop attending school on a regular basis
- Some start acting out and being disruptive in class
- Some just stop trying and start failing their courses

Impact of Adolescence and Poverty on Attendance in Baltimore

High Poverty Neighborhood	Percent of Elementary Students (Grade1-5) Missing 20+ Days	Percent of Middle Grade Students Missing 20+ Days
Clifton-Berea	15%	46%
Greenmount	15%	50%
Madison	21%	65%
Midway	6%	55%
Park Heights	17%	57%

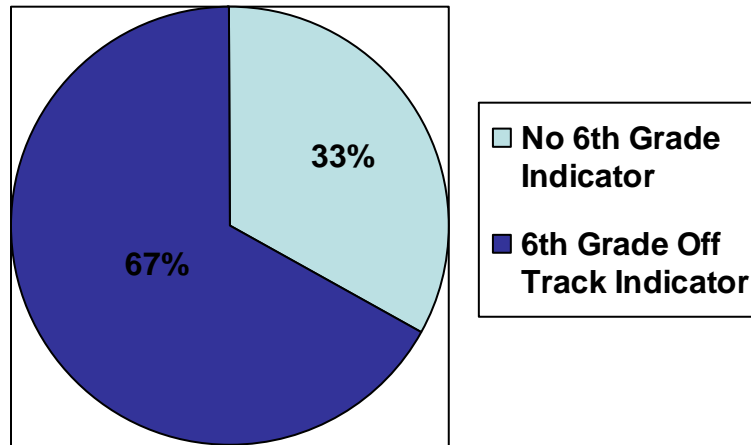
Source: BNIA

What Are the Consequences?

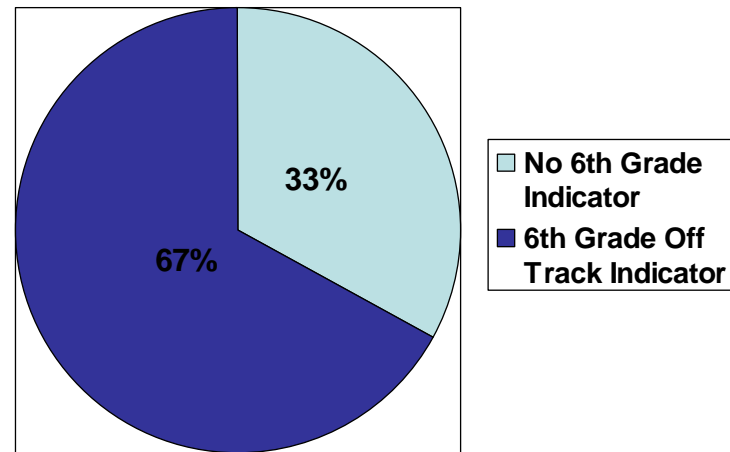
- Low Graduation Rates - 40 to 60% in Major Cities and Low Wealth Rural Districts
- Low Achievement - Excellent instructional programs and good teachers have limited impact when students do not attend school regularly, behave, engage, and try
- Increased Juvenile Crime and Teenage Pregnancy

School Disengagement Proceeds Involvement with the Juvenile Justice System and Teenage Pregnancy

Males Incarcerated in High School-Philadelphia



Females Who Give Birth in High School-Philadelphia



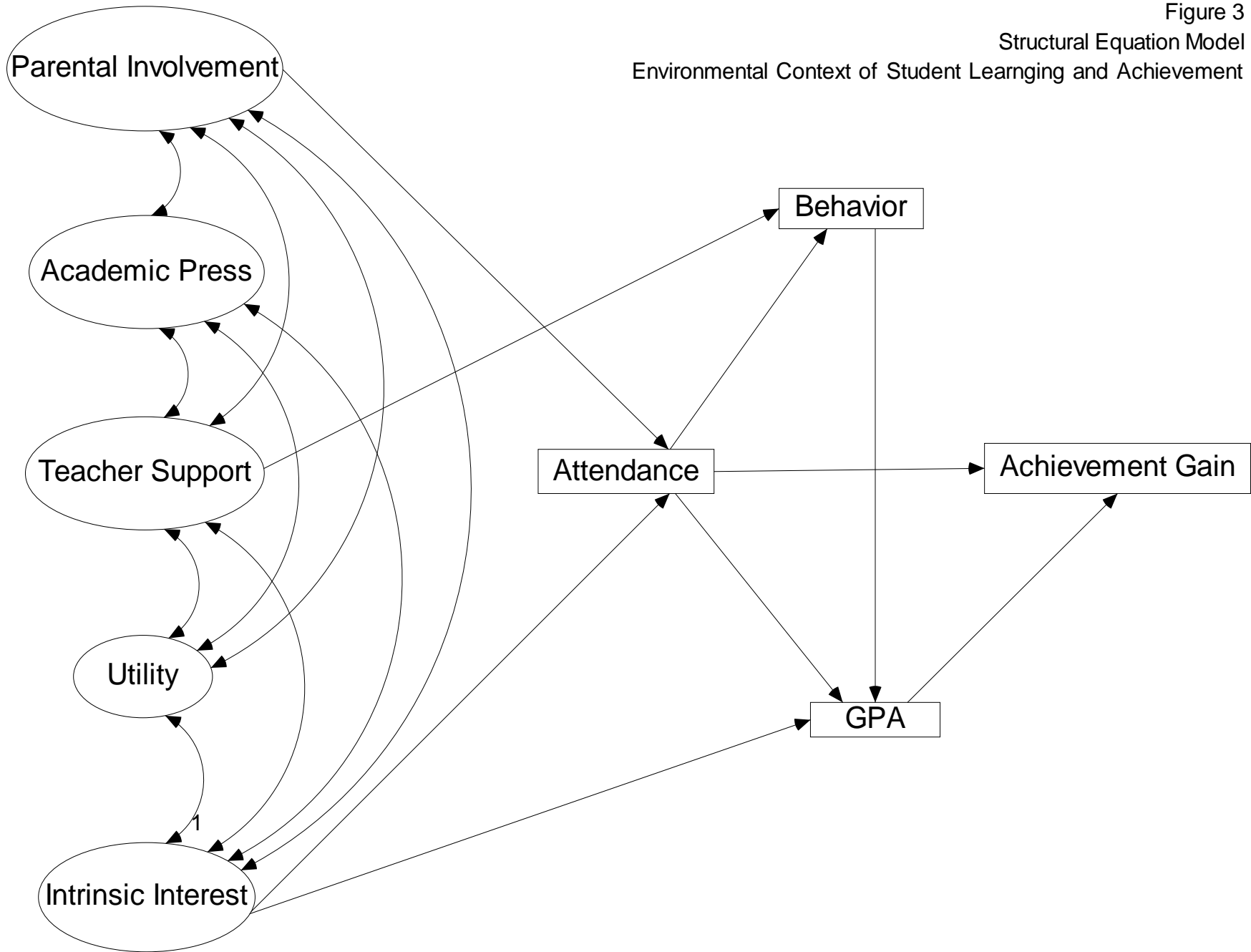
What Needs to be Done?

In Practice

Comprehensive, Systematic and Sustained Whole School Reforms Which 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



Link Early Warning Systems to Tiered Interventions

- Need to be able to respond to the first signs that a student is falling off track
- Systematically apply school-wide preventative, targeted and intensive interventions until students is on-track
- Great place to use National Service organizations (City Year, Americorps) to provide the person power to provide mentoring, tutoring, homework support, and manage attendance and behavior programs at the needed scale for an affordable price
- Need integrated student support providers (e.g. Communities in Schools) to bring in and monitor case-managed professional supports for the most in-need students

Public Health Prevention Model for Student Disengagement

Need Intervention Discipline - Only provide
targeted supports when School-wide
Prevention does not work

Only Provide Intensive when Targeted Does
not Work

Keeping Early Secondary Students on Track to Graduation (Grades 6-9)

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

What Needs to be Done

At a Policy Level

Pass Good Legislation and Fund it at Needed Levels

- Graduation Promise Act
- Success in the Middle
- Secondary Innovations Bill
- Keeping the Pace-Integrated Student Supports
- Create Educorps in Americorps Re-authorization

Get Graduation Rate Accountability Right

- Accurate Measure
- Disaggregated
- Meaningful Progress Goals and Benchmarks
- Equal to Test Scores

Conclusion

- We know which schools will produce the majority of dropouts in the next 5 years
- We can identify which students within those schools absent sustained interventions will drop out
- Thus we can positively alter the life course of millions of students and in so doing transform the nation, achieve a tremendous civil rights victory, improve social welfare, and enhance the nation's competitiveness
- Let's get to work

For More Information

- Visit www.gradgap.org
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