



## **Back on Track to Graduate**

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Diplomas Now combines whole-school reform, an early-warning system, and a second shift of adults to keep all students on the path to graduation.

Students who struggle and fall off track during early and middle adolescence, particularly at the start of middle school (6th grade) and high school (9th grade), typically do not graduate, especially in high-poverty communities (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver, 2007). In the United States, students in high-poverty communities are concentrated in a subset of 1,750 high schools with low graduation rates and their feeder middle-grade schools, which about half of the nation's dropouts attend (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Moore, & Fox, 2010).

These schools face an education challenge they were not designed to meet. They often enroll hundreds and sometimes even thousands of students who need more than good instruction every day. To remain engaged in school, these students require intensive academic and social-emotional supports. Their sheer numbers often overwhelm such traditional efforts as providing extra help, behavior management, attendance monitoring, and counseling. As a result, schools often resort to triage and dysfunctional responses that lead to high rates of educator turnover and burnout. This makes matters worse because educating the highest-needs students then falls to a transient and under-supported set of adults (Neild & Balfanz, 2006).

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