

Middle Grades Early Warning Intervention Monitoring System Implementation Guide

For use with the National High School Center's Early Warning System Middle Grades Tool

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For use with the National High School Center's Early Warning System (EWS) Middle Grades Tool

Overview

This *Middle Grades Early Warning Intervention Monitoring System (EWIMS) Implementation Guide* is a supporting document for schools and districts that are implementing an early warning system or, specifically, the National High School Center's Early Warning System (EWS) Middle Grades Tool. Developed by the National High School Center at American Institutes for Research (AIR), the guide and tool support the establishment and implementation of an early warning system that identifies and monitors middle grades students who are at risk for grade retention and/or eventually dropping out of school. This guide is designed to build the capacity of school- and district-level practitioners to analyze data from the EWS Middle Grades Tool, a free downloadable tool based in Microsoft Excel.¹

The National High School Center's Early Warning System Tool: Middle Grades

Using the EWS Middle Grades Tool as part of an early warning system in the middle grades is one method that can be used to collect information indicating which students are displaying signs of disengagement and risk that predict an increased likelihood of being off-track in the middle grades and/or dropping out of high school.

The EWIMS process emphasizes using the National High School Center's EWS Middle Grades Tool (available with the accompanying *EWS Middle Grades Tool Technical Manual* at http://betterhighschools.org/EWS_middle.asp), but it also may be used as a guide for an alternative research-based early warning system tool.

The aim of the guide and the tool is to support school and district efforts to systematically identify students who are showing signs of struggling in school (an early indicator of risk), match these students to appropriate interventions, and monitor their progress in those interventions. The guide describes an EWIMS implementation process that draws on the research on data-driven decision making.² This EWIMS process has seven steps:

- Step 1. Establish roles and responsibilities.
- Step 2. Use the EWS Middle Grades Tool.
- Step 3. Review the EWS data.
- Step 4. Interpret the EWS data.
- Step 5. Assign and provide interventions.
- Step 6. Monitor students and interventions.
- Step 7. Evaluate and refine the EWIMS process.

¹ For access to the National High School Center's EWS Middle Grades Tool, go to http://betterhighschools.org/EWS_middle.asp.

² See, for example, Bernhardt (2004) and Love (2000).

THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN THE MIDDLE GRADES

The high school dropout problem has been called a national crisis. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (Stillwell, 2010), only 74.9 percent of public high school students graduate with a diploma. The problem is particularly severe among students of color, English language learners (ELLs), disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities (Greene & Winters, 2005; Rooney et al., 2006; Stillwell, 2010).

So, why does dropout prevention support matter for middle grades students? The answer is simple: Dropping out of school is a process that can start long before a student enters high school. Research suggests that students exhibit clear signs during the middle grades that enable educators to identify which students are at greatest risk of dropping out (Balfanz, 2009).

The intent of EWIMS in the middle grades is to identify students early and provide them with support so that they can get back on track for promotion to the next grade level and eventually graduate from high school. Informed by research about the academic and behavioral predictors of dropping out (Allensworth & Easton, 2005, 2007), such early warning systems are a promising approach to effective dropout prevention (Dynarski et al., 2008). An early warning system uses readily available data to systematically identify students who are at risk; identified students then can be matched with appropriate interventions to help them get on track for graduation (Heppen & Therriault, 2008; Jerald, 2006; Kennelly & Monrad, 2007; Neild, Balfanz, & Herzog, 2007; Pinkus, 2008).

Researchers have identified key indicators in the middle grades that can reliably and accurately identify youth who are most at risk of academic failure. For example, Balfanz (2009) found that sixth graders in Philadelphia who failed mathematics or English language arts, attended school less than 80 percent of the time, or received unsatisfactory behavior grades in a core course had only a 10 percent to 20 percent chance of graduating on time. Furthermore, fewer than one out of four students with at least one of these risk indicators graduated from high school within five years. On the basis of this finding and similar research findings, a set of attendance and academic indicators and thresholds have become generally accepted—at least as a good starting point—to establish a basic early warning system. Table 1 provides an overview of these indicators.

Table 1. Middle Grades EWS Indicators and Thresholds

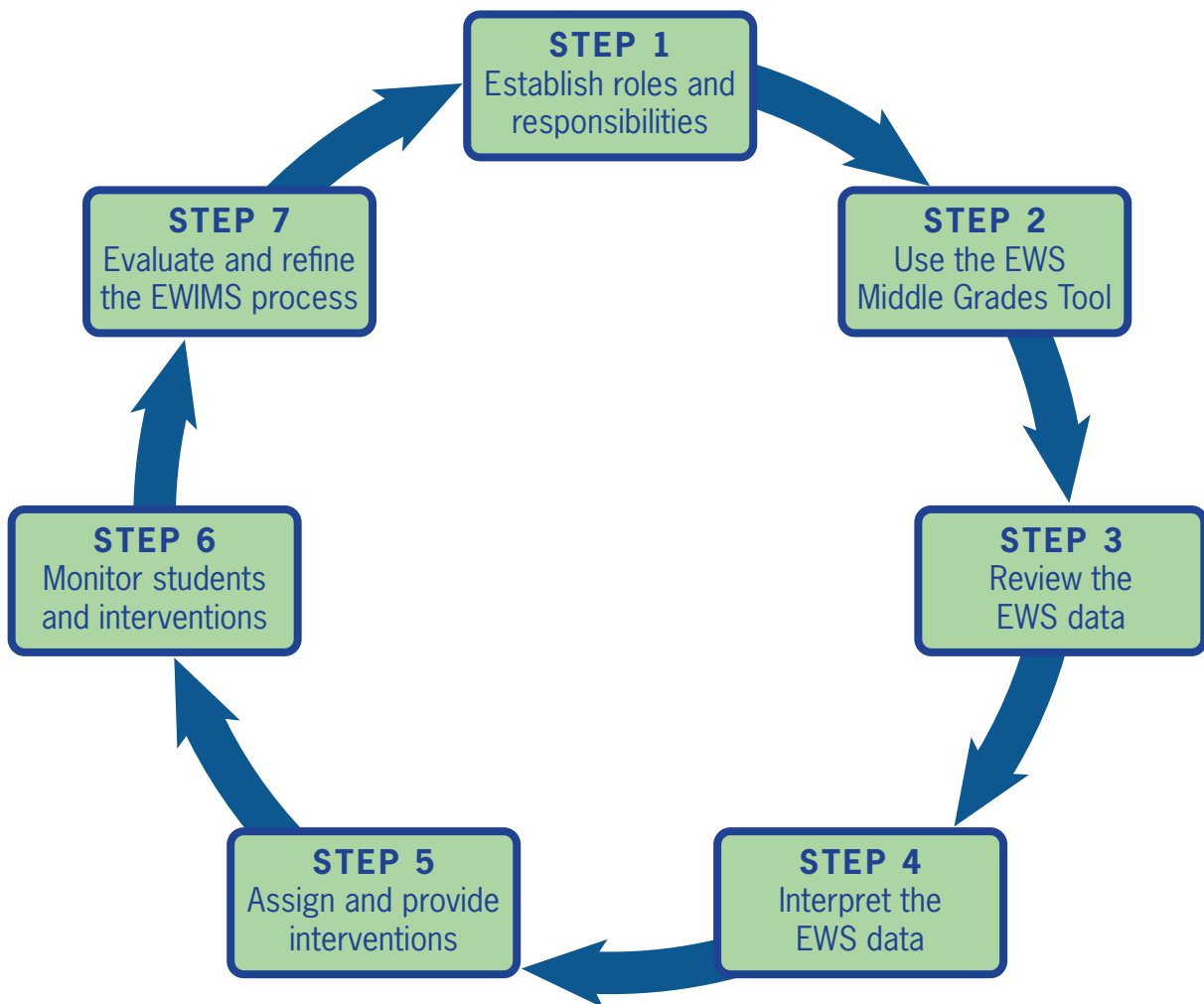
Indicator	Threshold*
Attendance	Student missed 20% or more of instructional time (absences)
Course Performance	Student failed an English language arts or mathematics course
Behavior	Locally validated thresholds (e.g., referrals, in- or out-of-school suspension, behavior grades)

* Please see the *National High School Center Early Warning System Middle Grades Tool Technical Manual* for a more thorough discussion of thresholds.

SEVEN-STEP EWIMS IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The seven steps in this guide are described as distinct processes, but each step is part of an entire system or cycle. Figure 1 illustrates the cycle. In addition to identifying students, this process guides users in making informed decisions on the basis of these indicators and other relevant information.

Figure 1. Early Warning Intervention Monitoring System: Implementation Process



TIMEFRAME

The middle grades EWIMS implementation process is aligned with the academic calendar and is implemented during the course of the school year. Specific steps are taken during defined periods, many recurring or continuously, so that the process of reviewing early warning data and identifying appropriate support strategies and interventions is timely and responsive to individual student needs. In the longer term, the process allows ongoing evaluation and revision across academic years to ensure that EWIMS achieves maximum efficiency and efficacy in the local context. Table 2 provides an example of an EWIMS implementation process during a single school year.

Table 2. Example Schedule for Implementing an Early Warning Intervention Monitoring System for Students in the Middle Grades

Schedule	Process (Correlated to Steps in This Guide)
Prior to the start of the school year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form/designate an EWIMS team (Step 1). • Provide professional development to EWIMS team members about the EWS implementation process (Steps 1 and 2). • Convene the EWIMS team (Step 1). • Set up the EWS Middle Grades Tool or other research-based EWS tool (Step 2). • Import or enter student information and, if available, incoming risk indicator data into the EWS Middle Grades Tool (Step 2). • Review and interpret student needs on the basis of data from the previous year (Steps 3 and 4). • Identify interventions for incoming students on the basis of the identified needs (Step 5).
At the beginning of the school year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconvene the EWIMS team (Step 1). • Verify student information, especially enrollment status, and update the student roster to reflect new enrollees, transfers in and out, and other classifications (Step 2). • Review incoming risk indicators or previous year data, including any additional information to interpret student needs (Steps 3 and 4). • Identify and implement student interventions or supports on the basis of incoming risk indicator information if available (Step 5).
After the first 20 or 30 days of the school year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the student roster to reflect new enrollees, transfers in and out, and other classifications (Step 2). • Import students' absences (Step 2). • Review and interpret student- and school-level reports (Steps 3 and 4). • Identify and implement student interventions (Step 5). • Monitor students' initial responses to interventions in which they are participating (Step 6). • Revise students' intervention assignments, as needed (Steps 5 and 6).

(Continued)

Schedule	Process (Correlated to Steps in This Guide)
After each grading period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the student roster to reflect new enrollees, transfers in and out, and other classifications (Step 2). • Import or enter students' absences, course failures, and behavior information (Step 2). • Review and interpret student- and school-level reports (Steps 3 and 4). • Identify and implement student interventions (Step 5). • Monitor students' responses to interventions in which they are participating (Step 6). • Revise students' intervention assignments, as needed (Steps 5 and 6).
At the end of the school year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the student roster to reflect new enrollees, transfers in and out, and other classifications (Step 2). • Import or enter students' absences, course failures, and behavior information (Step 2). • Review and interpret student- and school-level data (Steps 3 and 4). • Monitor students' responses to existing interventions in which they are participating (Step 6). • Revise students' intervention assignments for summer and for the next academic year (Steps 5 and 6). • Evaluate the EWIMS process, using student- and school-level reports, and revise as necessary (Step 7). • Export student data to (1) prepare the EWS Middle Grades Tool or other research-based EWS tool for the next school year and/or (2) share data with students' high school(s) for those students who are transitioning to high school.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS GUIDE

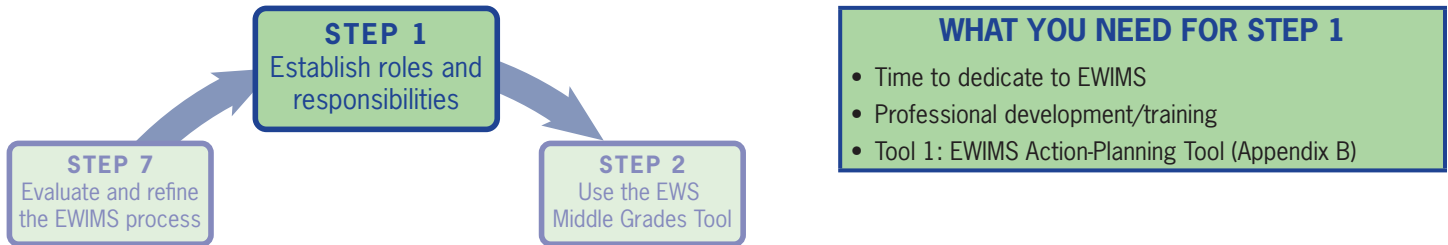
The guide contains separate sections for each of the seven EWIMS steps. Because of its emphasis on individual student identification and monitoring, the guide primarily focuses on supporting EWIMS efforts at the school level and, specifically, in schools that serve students in the *middle grades*. However, for each step of the process, the critical role of the district in supporting school-level EWIMS work is discussed.³

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

In each section, the guide briefly describes the step, identifies the anticipated outcomes, provides guiding questions to support implementation, and explains the role of the district. The guiding questions focus on short-term and long-term strategies. The short-term guiding questions are intended for EWIMS team members as they examine student data for individuals and for groups. The long-term guiding questions focus on systemic and far-reaching issues and strategies to improve school and district outcomes. Thus, it is anticipated that new users of the tool will focus on the short-term questions and, over time, will be ready to delve into long-term questions.

³ For a summary of the district's role in the implementation of EWIMS, see Appendix A.

STEP 1—Establish Roles and Responsibilities



DESCRIPTION OF STEP 1

This step focuses on identifying team members to concentrate on EWIMS implementation as well as establishing roles and responsibilities of team members and other key individuals who support the EWIMS team. Although a school or district may choose to establish a new team, *it is not necessary to create an entirely new EWIMS team for the process to work*. An existing team (such as a school improvement team, a response-to-intervention team, or a student support team) can take on the responsibility of implementing EWIMS.

The team must have a broad representation of staff (e.g., principals, teachers, specialists) within the school and, ideally, the district. The team also must have members with a diverse set of skills—including technical skills to use the EWS Middle Grades Tool and knowledge of students who are receiving special services. In addition, the team should have the authority to make decisions about students. Further, the EWIMS team must receive professional development about the process and the use of the EWS Middle Grades Tool and must be given adequate time to implement the EWIMS process. Whether EWIMS is the responsibility of a new team or incorporated into the responsibilities of an existing school team, it is vital that the EWS work be a main priority of the designated team.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OF STEP 1

1. Establishment of an EWIMS team composed of staff who have a diverse knowledge of students in the school, who understand their roles, and who are trained in the use of the tool and the EWIMS process
2. Establishment of meeting routines and common agendas
3. Identification of one or more individuals responsible for importing or entering data into the tool on a routine basis

Forming and Maintaining an Active EWIMS Team

The EWIMS team should consist of personnel who have the authority to make decisions about staff and students and who know a diverse array of students. Following are some examples of staff who might be included on an EWIMS team:

- School principal or assistant principal
- Representative from feeder elementary schools from which students transitioned
- Representative from high schools to which students will transition
- Counselor

- Teacher from grade-level team
- Teacher from the mathematics and/or English language arts content area
- Special education teacher
- ELL instructor
- School-level and district-level technology specialist
- District office representative
- District technology/student information specialist

Roles and Responsibilities of the EWIMS Team

As part of its implementation of the seven-step EWIMS process, the EWIMS team should do the following to ensure the functioning of the EWIMS team and effective communication throughout the school:

- *Conduct EWIMS team meetings that are well organized and documented.* An agenda for each meeting should be prepared at the end of the prior meeting. Some agenda items should be consistent from meeting to meeting, such as a review of the data from the tool, actions taken for individual or groups of students, or a review of previous meeting action items and communication with staff and leadership (see Table 2 for an example of action items). Notes should be taken at each meeting and should include action items assigned to specific individuals. Last, agenda and meeting notes should be kept on file to provide a record of the team's work.
- *Communicate with individuals and groups outside of the EWIMS team.* Information about flagged students, intervention effectiveness, and team-identified needs should be routinely reported to school and district leadership. Teachers should receive regular updates about students in their classes who are displaying indicators of risk as well as how to support these students. Students and their parents should be kept informed of their risk status and about the plans to ensure that the students are able to get back on track for their grade level, for promotion, and for graduation. (Although the EWIMS team may not be directly responsible for meetings with individual students and their parents, the team should be in a position to prompt such meetings and to routinely share information about student progress and the early warning symptoms of risk. Of critical note, the team should share the knowledge of students' risk with sensitivity, ensuring that identification is used to prompt action and support, not to give labels that carry stigma.)
- *Solicit feedback from stakeholders.* Feedback from administrators, teachers, staff, students, and parents can help the team uncover underlying causes for why students display indicators of risk. This information may help the EWIMS team match students to appropriate interventions and supports.
- *Monitor progress.* EWIMS team members should monitor progress as they strive to improve educational outcomes for students during a single school year and during the course of multiple school years. The team should be responsible for presenting progress reports to key stakeholders—including principals, staff, district leadership, local boards of education, and parents.

EWIMS Team Meetings

The EWIMS team should meet regularly throughout the year—a minimum of three times per year. At least one meeting should be held at the following times: before the start of school, after the first 20 or 30 days of school, and shortly after the end of each grading period. The team can use **Tool 1: EWIMS Action-Planning Tool** (Appendix B) to plan and implement the early warning system.

EWIMS TEAM GOALS

Setting realistic and measurable team goals and objectives is an important part of the EWIMS process. The goals should outline what the team hopes to accomplish, benchmarks to assess progress toward those goals, and regular monitoring of the goals throughout the year. These goals will help focus the team on the roles and responsibilities of the members and their place within the larger EWIMS process.

In all EWIMS team meetings, reviewing and discussing the information available in the EWS Middle Grades Tool will be essential. The meeting(s) convened prior to the start of the new school year should focus on identifying incoming students with risk indicators, discussing applicable intervention strategies, and setting EWIMS goals. During the school year, the EWIMS team should have more frequent meetings, which will allow the team to discuss issues as they arise and to monitor students' progress. At the end of the school year, the EWIMS team should meet to discuss ways to improve support for at-risk students and to improve the operation of the EWIMS team.

The focus of EWIMS team meetings is to review and discuss the information available in the EWS Middle Grades Tool, particularly information about individual students who have been identified as being off-track for promotion and graduation. The EWIMS team should consider assigning interventions for each identified student and then continue using the data from the EWS Middle Grades Tool to closely monitor progress and ensure that the assigned interventions are adequately supporting each student. This process will allow for midcourse corrections if a particular student does not seem to improve after being assigned to an intervention.

DISTRICT ROLE IN STEP 1

District representation and participation in EWIMS teams is essential. Ideally, a district representative should participate on each school-based EWIMS team. However, the number and composition of EWIMS teams in a district may depend on the size of the district. Large districts with many schools may have one school-based team at each school and another district-level team with both school and district representation. Smaller districts may have one school-based team in each school, with both school and district representation.

The role of the district is to identify systemwide concerns as well as develop and recommend districtwide changes that address those concerns. District administrators also play a key role in communicating the importance of the EWIMS within and across schools, through professional development, and by monitoring school-level efforts. Districts should consider the following roles:

- *Engage in school-level meetings or routinely communicate with EWIMS teams* to increase attention to the EWIMS efforts and signify the importance of the EWIMS work.
- *Provide EWIMS team members with professional development on implementing EWIMS and using EWS data* to enhance the work of the school EWIMS team and decrease the variation in the quality of the EWIMS team's work across schools.
- *Monitor school efforts to implement EWIMS throughout the school year, at multiple grade levels (middle and high school grades), and during the course of multiple school years* to ensure that schools are improving outcomes for students and to identify promising practices and areas of need in the district as a whole.

In large districts, a district EWIMS team (in addition to the school-level teams) should include at least one key representative from each school-level team. A district team may meet less frequently than the school-based teams (e.g., two to four times a year) to discuss persistent challenges, resources, and strategies for supporting students—as well as systemic, organization, and policy changes that may be needed. The school-level representatives can help the district team develop new districtwide strategies for at-risk students (e.g., new behavioral management approaches or training for teachers and students, increased professional development in adolescent literacy).

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR STEP 1

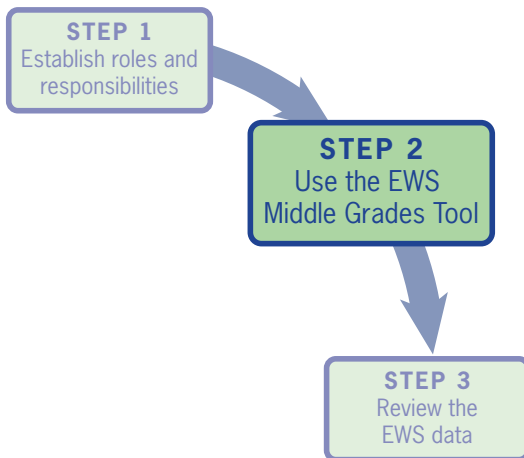
Short-Term Questions

1. What school and district stakeholders should be represented on the EWIMS team (e.g., district administrators, counselors, teachers, support staff, technology specialists)?
2. If considering team members who are external to the school, how should these individuals be involved in the team? For example, should these members come to every meeting? Is it appropriate for team members who are external to the school to monitor student-level data? What is the commitment you expect from them?
3. Who will be responsible for importing information into the EWS Middle Grades Tool?
4. Does the EWIMS team have sufficient authority to make decisions about students on the basis of EWS data?
5. How frequently should the EWIMS team meet?
6. What type of professional development is needed to train and support the school-level and district-level team(s)?
7. What additional resources are needed to support the team (e.g., access to student records, professional development)?

Long-Term Questions

1. Who will continue to be part of the EWIMS team the following year?
2. What are the key goals of the team? How are they measured?
3. What are the most significant challenges facing the team?
4. What are the important lessons learned? How will these lessons inform future work?
5. What, if any, additional resources are needed?
6. What types of professional development for team members should be planned to continue to build the capacity of the EWIMS team and other key and support staff?

STEP 2—Use the EWS Middle Grades Tool



WHAT YOU NEED FOR STEP 2

- Access to student data and the EWS Middle Grades Tool for the entire EWIMS team
- Timeline for data import/entry
- Trained data import/entry designee
- EWS Middle Grades Tool and *Technical Manual*

DESCRIPTION OF STEP 2

Step 2 describes the management of EWS data in a middle grades EWS tool. A robust early warning system uses readily available student data and validated indicators of risk to identify middle grades students who are at risk of not being promoted to the next grade and/or not graduating from high school so that they can be matched with appropriate supports and interventions. Districts or schools may develop their own early warning systems or may access the EWS Middle Grades Tool (available at http://betterhighschools.org/EWS_middle.asp).

The following information is tailored for the EWS Middle Grades Tool; however, the guidance is applicable for the use of other types of EWS tools. Step 2 is divided into inputs needed to identify at-risk students and the outputs provided by the tool.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OF STEP 2

1. Understanding of the basic features of the EWS Middle Grades Tool and EWS reports by all team members
2. Designated district or school technology specialist or specialists who are responsible for loading the tool with student data on a regular and timely basis
3. Fully populated tool with up-to-date information that is based on regular import or entry according to the established schedule

Tool Setup

The EWS Middle Grades Tool allows users to identify and monitor at-risk students throughout the school year, using research-based indicators to flag at-risk students. Students are flagged as “at risk” when they show signs of being off-track for their grade level, which may result in future grade retention and/or not graduating from high school. The EWS Middle Grades Tool has many functions to facilitate data-driven decision making to help students. These functions allow users to do the following:

- Customize the tool settings to reflect the local context (e.g., number of grading periods, race and disability categories, and other classifications).
- Integrate locally validated incoming indicators of risk to identify students who may need support as they transition into and through the middle grades.⁴
- Identify at-risk students on the basis of locally defined behavior indicators (e.g., suspensions, behavior grades, state assessment results).
- Import and export student-level data.
- Group students with user-defined groupings (e.g., teams, pods, academies).
- Produce reports, including student-level and school-level data summaries.
- Assign and monitor student interventions over time.
- Modify default risk-indicator thresholds after they are locally validated. (See Step 7 for more information on validating locally defined risk indicator thresholds.)

The EWS Middle Grades Tool requires users to complete two key tasks. First, they must ensure that the data are up-to-date. Second, they should back up information produced by the tool (e.g., lists of flagged students, summary reports) and regularly provide that data to the EWIMS team so that the team can make informed decisions about students. To accomplish these tasks, each EWIMS team needs to have (1) access to the EWS Middle Grades Tool or the generated reports; (2) one or more trained staff who can import or enter information into the EWS Middle Grades Tool and who are knowledgeable about its screens and features; (3) a timeline for ensuring that data are imported or entered and reviewed in a timely manner; and (4) a plan ensuring that appropriate confidentiality requirements are followed to develop reports and share information with multiple stakeholder groups inside and outside the school.

This process will ensure that the data in the tool are current and that the EWIMS team is able to access the appropriate student-level and school-level reports on the basis of the needs and priorities. For example, if the EWIMS team is meeting after the first month of school, the most current attendance data should be entered into the tool and a report should be generated and shared with EWIMS team members. This report identifies students flagged for missing too many days during the first month of school (the risk indicator information that will be available after the first month of school).

Data Inputs

The EWS Middle Grades Tool uses information about student attendance, course failures, and behavior (referrals, suspensions, behavior grades) to identify, or “flag,” students who are at risk for not being at grade level, not being promoted to the next grade, and/or not graduating from high school. Identification is based on indicators that are locally validated or that are grounded in research about the predictors of dropout and graduation (Balfanz, 2009). Table 3 provides a summary of the risk indicators in the EWS Middle Grades Tool and the timeframe in which these indicators are available.

⁴ Please see Step 7 for a more thorough discussion of locally validated indicators.

Table 3. Summary of Risk Indicators, Timeframes, and Risk Indicator Thresholds in the National High School Center’s EWS Middle Grades Tool

Indicator*	Timing of Available Outputs	Middle Grades Risk-Indicator Threshold
Incoming Indicator†	Before school begins	Locally validated‡ indicators of risk or indicators of risk from a prior year’s EWS Middle Grades Tool
Attendance	After 20 or 30 days; at the end of each grading period (e.g., semester); at the end of the year (annual)	Missed 20 percent or more of instructional time
Course Failures	At the end of each grading period (e.g., semester); at the end of the year (annual)	Failed an English language arts or mathematics course
Behavior†	Each grading period (e.g., semester); end of year (annual)	Locally validated (e.g., referrals, in- or out-of-school suspension, behavior grades)
Exit Indicator§	End of year	Locally validated or any risk flag in the final grading period of the full academic school year

* Please see the *National High School Center Early Warning System Middle Grades Tool Technical Manual* for a more thorough discussion of indicators.

† These indicators are not required. If the user has not locally validated the risk threshold for the indicator, the EWS Middle Grades Tool will operate without this information.

‡ Please see Step 7 for a more thorough discussion of locally validated indicators.

§ Please see the *National High School Center Early Warning System Middle Grades Tool Technical Manual* for a more thorough discussion of exit indicators.

The EWS Middle Grades Tool is designed to allow users to identify at-risk students on the basis of an incoming risk indicator as well as risk indicators that can be monitored throughout the year. An incoming risk indicator is locally defined and can be validated through review of multiple years of data. However, the tool primarily is designed to monitor students during the time they are in the middle grades and will still operate if an incoming risk indicator is not available. The middle grades indicators use information about attendance (absence rates) and course performance (English language arts and mathematics) to flag students who are at risk: after the first 20 or 30 days of school, after each grading period, and at the end of the year.

To improve the ease with which data are imported into the Data Inputs section of the Middle Grades Tool, the National High School Center created source file collators to consolidate student data into a source file that can be easily imported into the EWS Middle Grades Tool. These collators, available for middle grades student information and middle grades student performance data, are particularly helpful for schools or districts that maintain various pieces of student data in more than one student information system or that are unable to generate a single report with all the student information fields in the order required for the EWS Middle Grades Tool source file specifications. Each free, downloadable, Microsoft Excel-based file includes a source file collator and instructions for use and is available at http://www.betterhighschools.org/EWS_middle.asp.

Outputs and Reports

After these data inputs (source files) are imported into the tool, the tool output provides a list of students who are at risk, on the basis of the previously described risk indicators (see Table 3). Similarly, at the end of the year, the tool uses information from the final grading period to determine an exit indicator of risk. For example, if a student is flagged for any indicator of risk (e.g., failed a mathematics or English language arts course), the student will be flagged as at risk of not being on grade level. In turn, the exit indicator becomes the “incoming indicator” of risk for the subsequent grade level. The exit indicator allows schools to plan support for at-risk students before the start of the next school year.

DISTRICT ROLE IN STEP 2

The district can do the following to support the use of the EWS Middle Grades Tool:

- *Provide professional development* in using the EWS Middle Grades Tool (either directly or through a third party) to team members.
- *Provide technical assistance* by regularly backing up the tool and disseminating reports to the school-based team.
- *Align the district data systems and variables with the EWS Middle Grades Tool data variables* to streamline the efforts of the school EWIMS team (e.g., developing a script that enables the data to be exported easily from the student information system to the EWS Middle Grades Tool). This streamlining will allow team members to focus on supporting students rather than on managing data or double-entering information.
- *Provide guidance about indicators of risk and then set thresholds* at which students are flagged.
- *Provide information to EWIMS teams about the incoming indicators of risk* (especially if students are coming from other schools within the district).

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR STEP 2

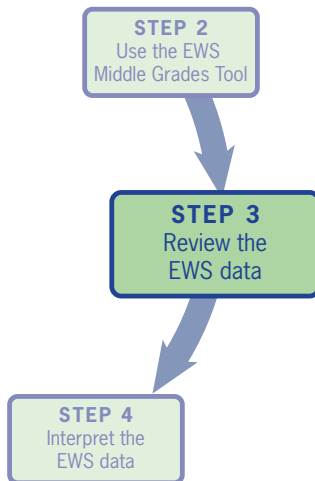
Short-Term Questions

1. Who will be responsible for the data import or entry into the EWS Middle Grades Tool?
2. What databases house the student data needed for tool functionality? How will the EWIMS team get access to those databases?
3. Who will develop reports for the EWIMS team?
4. How frequently will EWS data be monitored?
5. Who will provide reports to other stakeholders?
6. With whom will data from the tool be shared? How will student confidentiality be protected, as required by district policies?

Long-Term Questions

1. Which types of reports from the tool are most useful for informing school and district policy decisions?
2. How can the data entry and import process be streamlined or connected to existing data systems?
3. How can data from multiple years of the tool be used to validate local risk indicators, evaluate the impact of existing interventions, and identify persistent school-level or district-level challenges?

STEP 3—Review the EWS Data



WHAT YOU NEED FOR STEP 3

- EWS Middle Grades Tool, loaded with student information and performance data
- Student-level and school-level reports generated through the EWS Middle Grades Tool
- Convening of EWIMS team, aligned with the uploading of new student data

DESCRIPTION OF STEP 3

Step 3 describes how EWS data are reviewed to identify students who are at risk and how to understand patterns in student engagement and academic performance within the school. This step is critical when using any type of early warning data, although the focus here is on information and reports that are in the EWS Middle Grades Tool.

Step 3 should be revisited any time new data are available to examine both the short- and the long-term impacts of the interventions and programs being utilized within the school.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OF STEP 3

1. Identification of individual students who show signs of risk (not being on grade level in the middle grades) and who may not be promoted to and graduate from high school later
2. Understanding of patterns across groups of students and over time that allow the EWIMS team to begin to consider the allocation of student support resources to flagged students
3. *In preparation for Step 4:* Identification of the type of additional information that will be needed to better understand possible underlying reasons that specific students were flagged for particular indicators
4. *In preparation for Step 4:* Assignment of responsibilities for gathering the additional information and data regarding specific students and student characteristics

Reviewing Data

The EWS Middle Grades Tool yields a great deal of information. Step 3 helps users break down this information into manageable pieces that can be sorted, organized, and prioritized so that the EWIMS team can take action. Arranging the data in manageable ways allows team members to identify the students who show symptoms of risk (i.e., are flagged) and to develop questions to further investigate the underlying causes for students' symptoms of risk (see Step 4). To review EWS data, team members begin

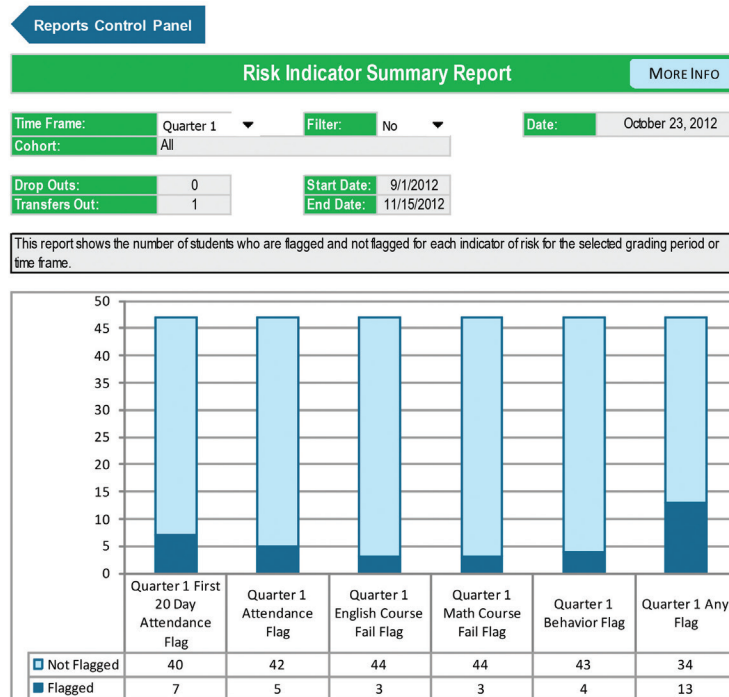
by examining which individual students are (and are not) flagged for attendance and course performance indicators of risk.⁵ If the EWIMS team is using the EWS Middle Grades Tool, flagged student information may be found by running various school-level and student-level reports from the Reports Control menu within the tool. On the basis of this initial review of the data, the team strategizes ways to prioritize student needs. The EWIMS team then can organize and sort at-risk students into groups on the basis of the indicators for which they are flagged (e.g., attendance, course performance, or both). The EWIMS team also may want to sort students by demographic characteristics in order to begin looking at group patterns to see if there are any larger group needs that should be addressed.

Reports available in the EWS Middle Grades Tool (through the Reports Control panel) provide multiple ways of examining student-level and school-level information. By using these reports, the team can examine individual, group, and whole-school patterns and consider the allocation of student support and dropout prevention resources. These reports allow the team to review summary information about the number and percentage of students in the school who are flagged in general and who are flagged for particular indicators.⁶

The following figures are examples of student-level and school-level reports from the EWS Middle Grades Tool.

Figure 2 shows a sample report of students who are flagged by risk indicator after the first grading period of school. On the basis of this report, the EWIMS team might discuss the individual students who are flagged for attendance, course performance, or both.

Figure 2. Student-Level Report: Flagged Student Report (First Grading Period) From the EWS Middle Grades Tool

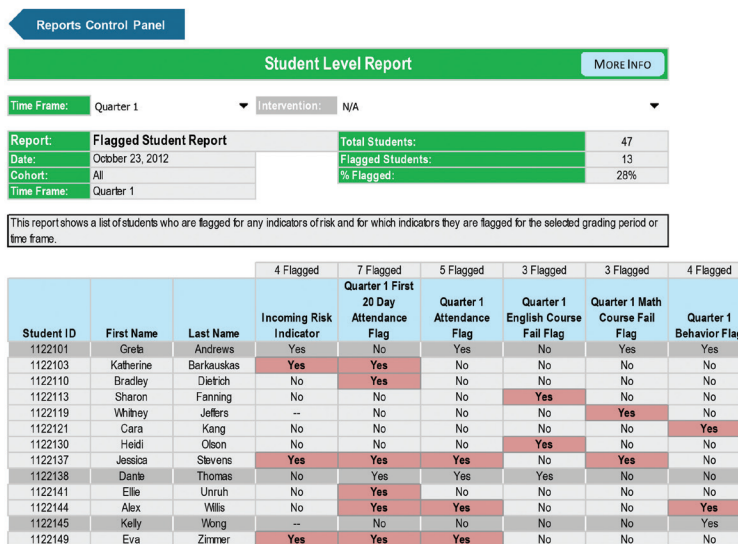


⁵ Note that if the team is reviewing student-level EWS data after the first 20 to 30 days of school, prior to when course performance data are entered, only attendance information will be available for review.

⁶ Instructions for generating reports in the EWS Middle Grades Tool are provided in the *EWS Middle Grades Tool Technical Manual* and within the EWS Middle Grades Tool, both of which are available at http://betterhighschools.org/EWS_middle.asp.

Figure 3 shows a school-level report that provides a summary of information about all students after the first quarter of school. The summary allows the team to develop an overall sense of the numbers of students displaying each type of risk indicator. The summative school report information may be useful to the EWIMS team during the time that its members explore answers to the long-term guiding questions about patterns of student engagement in school after the first grading period. Because the summative school report masks the identity of individual students, this type of report may be useful for sharing information with the entire school staff or school board. In addition, these data may be useful in beginning to examine issues or patterns related to groups of students to look at whether there are patterns related to classes, teachers, content areas, or other aspects that may be contributing to specific students being flagged.

Figure 3. School-Level Report: Flagged Student Report (First Quarter) From the EWS Middle Grades Tool



It is important to acknowledge that in some schools, a long list of students may be flagged for either attendance or course performance. In these schools, the EWIMS team must decide how best to allocate time to discuss each student or whether to adjust the thresholds of each risk indicator.

DISTRICT ROLE IN STEP 3

Information from the EWS Middle Grades Tool has immediate implications for staff and students in the school; however, at the district level, there is an opportunity to examine these data for a whole school or the whole district. For example, are students who are flagged as at-risk in the first grading period coming from a particular elementary school or set of elementary schools? The information from the EWS Middle Grades Tool can illuminate trends in students' indicators of risk for further exploration; in addition, this information may influence how resources are allocated or how policies and strategies are implemented in order to focus on issues that are particular to students within the district. The district also can help the EWIMS team review longitudinal data to clarify if there are trends across grades or among groups of flagged students.

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR STEP 3

Short-Term Questions

1. Which students are flagged as being at-risk? For which indicators are they flagged?
2. What are the most prevalent indicators among the students who are identified as at-risk?
3. Are there patterns among the students who are flagged for any particular indicator(s) of risk?
 - Were students who are currently flagged in the middle grades also flagged for the incoming risk indicator on the basis of information from the prior grade or grades?
 - Are students who are flagged for attendance indicators also flagged for failing mathematics or English language arts courses? Do some students show risk because of absences only? Do other students show risk because of poor course performance only?
 - Do some students show risk because of performance in mathematics only or in English language arts only?
 - Do students who are flagged for risk early in the school year continue to be flagged later in the year? Are they flagged for the same reasons or for different reasons?
 - What are the demographic characteristics (e.g., disability, disadvantaged status, ELL status) of students who are flagged and not flagged?

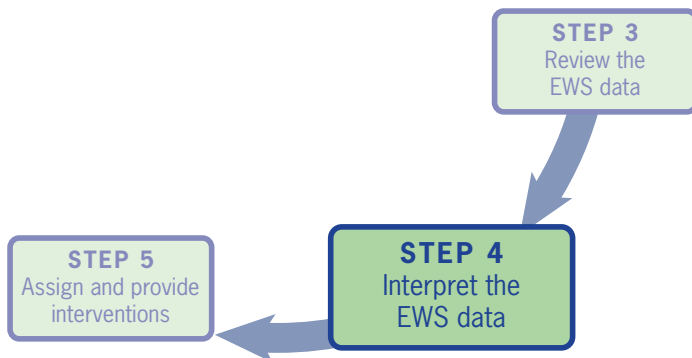
Long-Term Questions

1. Do students who were flagged in a previous school year (incoming indicator of risk) continue to be flagged in the current school year? If the answer is yes, are they flagged for the same reasons or for different reasons?
2. Do students who are flagged for risk early in the school year continue to be flagged later in the year? Are they flagged for the same reasons or for different reasons?
3. Do the number and percentage of students who are flagged for any indicator and for each different indicator change from year to year?
4. For students who are flagged, what percentage showed one or more risk indicators in prior grades? What percentage did not?⁸

⁷ The attendance and course performance indicators tend to co-occur (Allensworth & Easton, 2007); however, it may be useful to confirm whether this situation is the case in the local context. An attendance problem may be apparent before poor course performance and, if detected early, this problem could be addressed before course failures occur.

⁸ If the students were enrolled in the middle grades during the previous year, this information may be easily obtained by the school. However, if the students were enrolled in another school (e.g., elementary school), the district may need to provide data to facilitate answering this question.

STEP 4—Interpret the EWS Data



WHAT YOU NEED FOR STEP 4

- A list of questions raised by the data analysis during Step 3
- Additional information from other sources (e.g., student information systems, student records, teacher discussions/interviews)
- Time to meet and discuss findings

DESCRIPTION OF STEP 4

Step 4 describes how to examine in greater depth the factors that may contribute to the at-risk status of a student who is flagged. It is important to acknowledge that the indicators of risk are merely signs of deeper and more complex problems related to student disengagement and academic failure. Step 4 also builds on the review of EWS data conducted in Step 3 by encouraging the team to look more closely at the characteristics of flagged students. To complete this deeper analysis, teams must examine additional data that are not included in the EWS Middle Grades Tool but that are available in other information data systems or from individuals who interact with these students. For example, for students who are flagged for failing courses in English language arts, the EWIMS team might need to gather information about the students' academic challenges from the English language arts and/or mathematics teachers. The team should gather data from a variety of sources, with a focus on gathering information that can help inform decisions about appropriate supports and interventions (Step 5).

As previously mentioned, these additional sources may include information from classroom teachers or other adults in the school who interact with flagged students. In addition, the team may consider conducting one-on-one meetings with individual students, their families, or both. These meetings can shed light on the reasons that students are displaying indicators of risk; the meetings also may offer opportunities to engage students and the adults who interact with them in providing additional supports. The EWS Middle Grades Tool allows users easily to produce detailed student reports that are designed expressly for this purpose.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES FOR STEP 4

1. Better understanding of reasons that individual students, and groups of students, are flagged at-risk
2. Identification of individual and common needs among groups of students

Interpreting Data

After gathering additional information, the team should discuss individuals or groups of students and use factual evidence to identify underlying causes for the student or students being flagged as at-risk. On the basis of these investigations, the team should be able to identify some common and individual needs among student, prepare to identify and implement appropriate intervention strategies (Step 5), and monitor students' responses to these interventions (Step 6). The meeting to discuss underlying causes and student needs will take more time than a typical EWIMS meeting. It is critical to designate an appropriate amount of time to discuss the findings from exploring underlying causes of students' risk indicators.

DISTRICT ROLE IN STEP 4

Interpreting the EWS data requires access to student information beyond that data housed in the EWS Middle Grades Tool. District administrators can support these efforts by developing policies that give EWIMS team members or their designees access to information so that they are able to make informed decisions about student needs. This access may require availability of students' records prior to the current grade, including elementary school grades, attendance, behavioral information, and other data that can help EWIMS teams better understand their flagged students.

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR STEP 4

Short-Term Questions

At the Student Level

Attendance

1. Is there a day or certain time of day when the student is absent? Are certain classes missed?
2. Has the student had any behavioral referrals resulting in suspension, which may impact attendance?
3. Are there other indicators of risk (cross-check with failing English language arts and mathematics flags, incoming indicator flag, behavior flags [if applicable], and other information such as teacher reports and achievement test scores)?
4. What are the patterns and underlying reasons for absence among students who are flagged for attendance?
5. What other information do you need to understand the characteristics of students with attendance problems (e.g., special education status, ELL status, prior achievement)?

Academics

6. Did the student fail English language arts, mathematics, or both? What might be the underlying cause(s) (e.g., preparation for content, low literacy skills, an unidentified or untreated learning disability) of the low performance?
7. Is the student failing any other courses? In which classes does the student perform well?
8. In which classes or types of classes are flagged students enrolled (e.g., remedial reading or remedial mathematics courses)? Are there any patterns and underlying reasons for students who are flagged for academics?
9. What other information do you need to understand the patterns and/or common underlying reasons (e.g., special education status, ELL status, prior achievement) of students who are failing English language arts or mathematics?

Behavior (If Applicable)

10. What behavior(s) contributed to the behavior flag? How is each behavior problem being addressed? For instance, is the student in any sort of behavior intervention? Does he or she have any special needs that must be taken into consideration?
11. Are there patterns and underlying reasons for groups of students who are being flagged for behavior?
12. What other information do you need to understand the characteristics of students who are being flagged for behavior (e.g., special education status, ELL status, overage students for their grades)?

(Continued)

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR STEP 4 (Continued)

Short-Term Questions

At the Student Level

Any Flag

13. Is the student engaged in school (to determine this, cross-check with attendance flag, incoming indicator flag, behavior flag, and other information, such as teacher and counselor reports)?
14. What does the team believe are the underlying causes for poor attendance or academic failure among the flagged students?
15. What are the most prominent needs at the school and district levels that emerge from the analysis of the data? How will you prioritize these needs?
16. Can more information be gathered from students about the reasons they are exhibiting behaviors that cause them to be at risk (e.g., students do not find classes engaging, students' home responsibilities are causing them to be absent)?

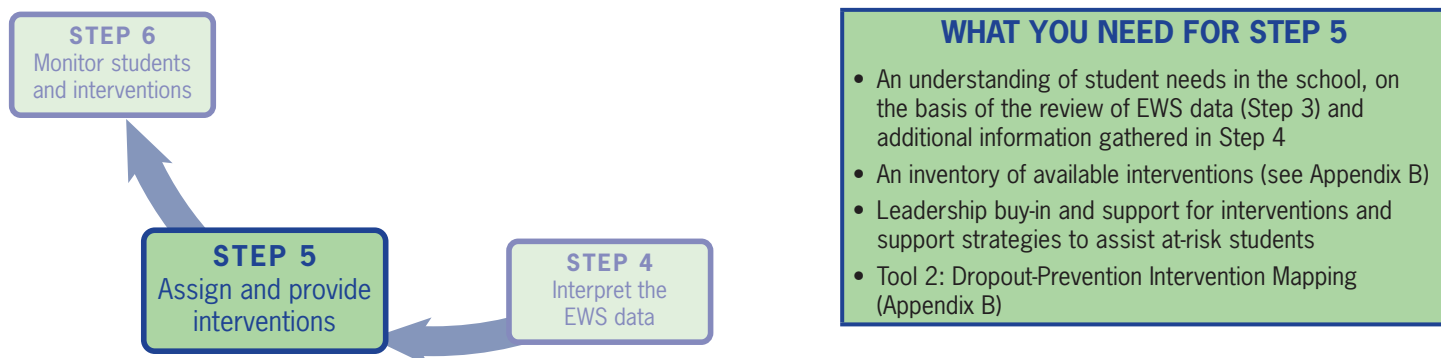
At the School Level

17. How might school attendance policies be affecting students who are flagged (e.g., consequences for a high number of absences)?
18. Looking across multiple grades, are students failing particular courses, being flagged at particular grade levels (e.g., seventh grade), or both? What changes could be made to improve outcomes for students in these course(s) or grade(s)?
19. How might the grading policy at the school impact students who are flagged?
20. On the basis of your analyses, is there anyone who is not currently on the EWIMS team who needs to be included (e.g., previous teachers, parents, guidance counselors, curriculum and instruction personnel)?

Long-Term Questions

1. Are there additional stakeholders (e.g., community members, law enforcement representatives, court representatives, human services representatives, business representatives, local policymakers, parents, teachers, students, guidance counselors, central office staff) who should be included in the long-term discussions about the way to systematically address the prevalence of risk factors displayed by students in the school? How will these stakeholders be engaged? How will buy-in be promoted?
2. What can the team do to ensure that it can easily obtain additional data that are important for identifying underlying causes? What further information is necessary to get a better picture? What types of information are difficult to obtain? How can that information be made more accessible?

STEP 5—Assign and Provide Interventions



DESCRIPTION OF STEP 5

Step 5 provides information on making decisions about the allocation of available resources and strategies to support students identified as at risk of being off-track for grade level, being promoted to the next grade, and/or graduating from high school. This step also provides guidance on ways to systemically provide support to identified students, using a tiered approach. During Step 5, the EWIMS team matches individual students to specific interventions after having gathered information about (1) potential root causes for individual flagged students and (2) the available academic and behavioral support and intervention programs in the school, district, and community.

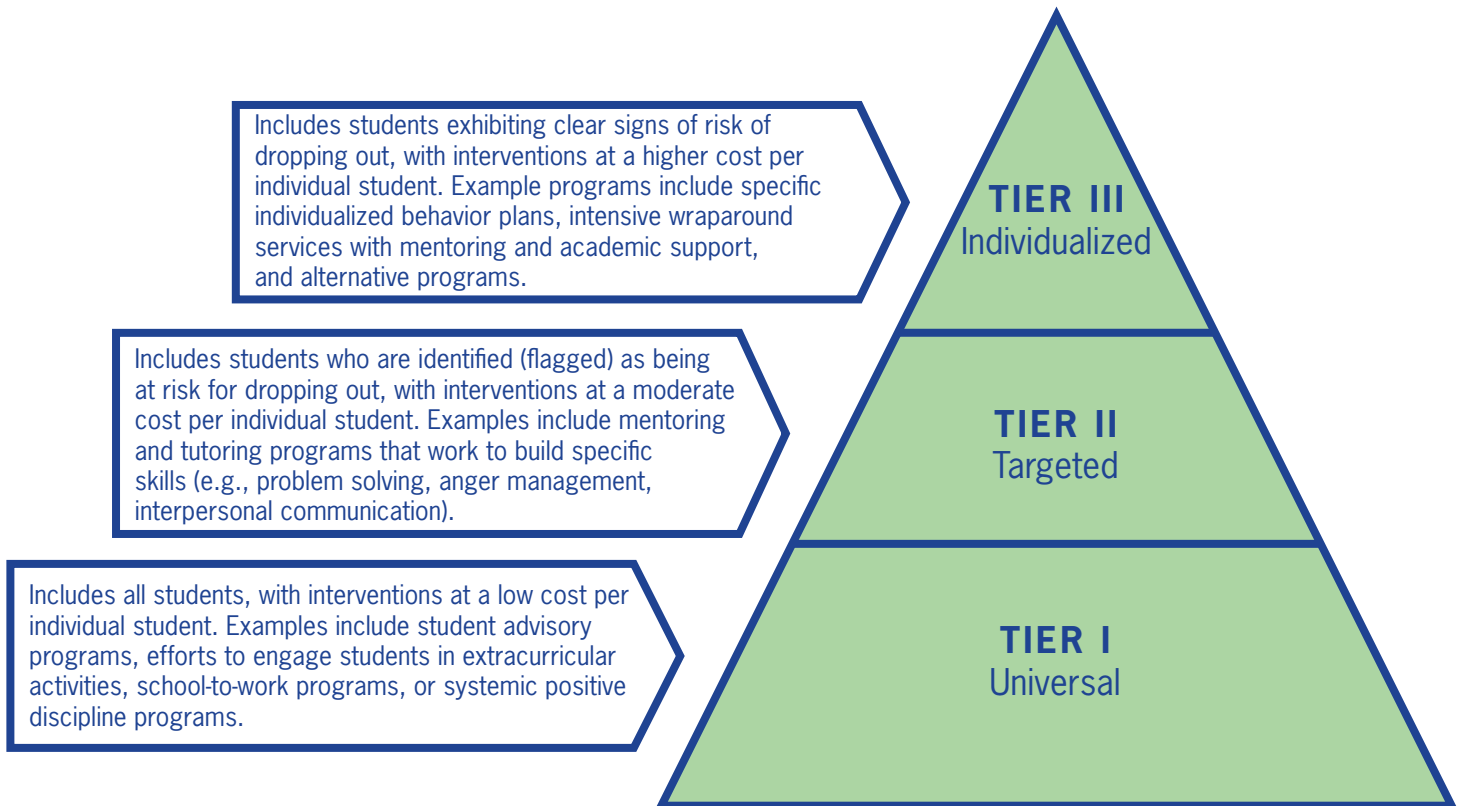
ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES FOR STEP 5

1. Compiled inventory of supports and interventions available to students in the school
2. Assignment of flagged students to supports and interventions on the basis of student needs identified in Steps 3 and 4 (documented for each individual student in the EWS Middle Grades Tool)
3. Identification of gaps in the available supports and interventions
4. Recommendations for schoolwide support strategies aimed at addressing the most common student needs identified in Steps 3 and 4

Assigning and Providing Interventions

In many schools and districts, student support resources and interventions are available but not systematically applied and their use is not well coordinated. To introduce a more systemic approach, schools and districts increasingly are organizing specific strategies or programs into tiers on the basis of the intensity of the interventions. Generally, the models have a two- or three-tiered intervention system, in which Tier I interventions are applied to all students in the school, Tier II interventions are moderately intensive and applied to small groups of students with common needs (sometimes individual students), and Tier III interventions are the most intensive and are provided to individual students with the highest level of need. Figure 4 is a depiction of a three-tiered model; such a model can be used for academic and behavioral interventions.

Figure 4. Example of Tiered Approach to Student Support and Dropout Prevention



Note: Adapted from the New Hampshire Department of Education's APEX II (Achievement in Dropout Prevention and Excellence) model and the Minnesota Department of Education's three-tiered model (see National High School Center, 2008).

When adopting or adapting such a model to help keep students at grade level in the middle grades, a district or school may consider the following:

- Explicitly communicating the purpose of the tiered model for keeping students on track to achieve buy-in at multiple levels, including stakeholders from state and local education agencies, families, and students
- Clearly defining the tiers within the model so that they are easily understood by all stakeholders, including administrators, educators, families, school support staff, and students
- Establishing a protocol that enables students to move through the tiers seamlessly and efficiently, as needs are identified and are changed

The EWS Middle Grades Tool is designed to allow the EWIMS team to monitor and adjust students' assignments to supports and interventions within the tool, as well as monitor their movements through tiers. In general, the EWS Middle Grades Tool assumes that in schools using a tiered approach, all students have access to Tier I interventions. Flagged students are eligible for Tier II or Tier III interventions, or both, on the basis of the EWIMS team assessment. These features will help schools and districts coordinate services and closely track the participation of individual students in supports and interventions and their response to those supports.

To match students to supports and interventions, the team will need to understand the supports and interventions that are available and the need(s) that each support and intervention will address. Creating an inventory of existing supports and interventions available to students in the school, district, and community will provide the team with a resource on which to base decisions about matching students to specific supports and interventions. Because the EWIMS process helps identify students early, student needs may be met by other, less intensive, types of supports. **Tool 2: Dropout-Prevention Intervention Mapping** (Appendix B) supports the development of an inventory of interventions.

After the inventory is developed, the team must review information about the needs of students, on the basis of the team's work in Steps 3 and 4, to match students to appropriate supports and interventions. The EWS Middle Grades Tool facilitates this process. The tool provides space to house information about the available interventions (from the inventory). Within the tool, users can document the specific programs to which individual students have been assigned (by date). After students are assigned to one or more intervention, the team can monitor students' progress and adjust the program of support as needed (see Step 6).

In addition, during the matching process, the team may identify gaps in the available supports and interventions for specific groups of students or for individual students. Identifying the gaps may provide an opportunity to discuss these needs with school and district leaders to obtain new supports.

Although the process relies heavily on data collected during Steps 3 and 4 to inform action, the team members are ultimately charged with using their professional judgment to recommend specific student supports and interventions. To ensure that each placement is appropriate and effective, the team continually monitors individual students' responses to interventions (Step 6) and, when needed, revises student placement after revisiting Steps 3 and 4.

DISTRICT ROLE IN STEP 5

The perspective of the district allows longer term solutions and strategies across schools. The district can do the following to support EWIMS teams in identifying appropriate interventions:

- *Identify common needs of students* across multiple schools.
- *Pinpoint districtwide solutions for common needs* across schools.
- *Provide solutions* for gaps in available interventions and supports.
- *Allocate resources* on the basis of identified needs within specific schools.
- *Support pre-middle grades interventions to improve student readiness* for the middle grades and high school (e.g., elementary and middle grades interventions).

Districts also have a role to play in facilitating the use of promising support and intervention programs. Through work with and as a part of EWIMS teams, district personnel can play key roles in identifying promising student supports and interventions as well as sharing effective support and intervention practices across schools.

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR STEP 5

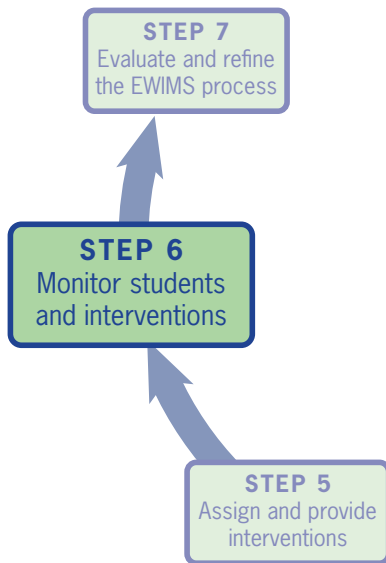
Short-Term Questions

1. What interventions are currently implemented in the school and district? How successful do they seem to be for keeping students on track or getting them back on track for promotion to the next grade level? What type of ongoing assistance is provided to implement supports and interventions with fidelity?
2. What structures (e.g., flexible scheduling) currently exist to support students who are at risk?
3. What trends in the data identify the immediate need for particular types of interventions (e.g., attendance monitors, professional development for teachers on instructional strategies, ninth-grade transition supports, opportunities for extended learning beyond the school day)?
4. If a tiered model is not already in place, is it possible to provide supports that are tiered by intensity on the basis of student need? What additional approaches can be used to coordinate services and prioritize the allocation of resources?
5. Do the characteristics (e.g., disability, economically disadvantaged status, ELL status) of the students identified as at-risk inform intervention decisions? Are there different ways to inform intervention decisions?

Long-Term Questions

1. Which supports and interventions appear to be the most successful at helping flagged students get back on track for graduation? How do you know that those approaches are the most successful?
2. How will you identify promising supports and interventions to address unmet student needs (e.g., attend conferences, purchase interventions, ask or visit other schools and districts, participate on study teams, review literature, seek help from regional or state agencies)?
3. Do trends in the data consistently identify the need for similar types of supports and interventions? How will school/district staff be included as part of the EWIMS efforts? How will this information be communicated to them? How will they be involved in decision making, implementation, and monitoring?
4. What school policies need to be in place to improve the implementation of support and intervention strategies?
5. What resources (e.g., time, materials, personnel, funding) are necessary to support interventions? What resources are available to support the identified students? If not sufficient, how will you obtain additional resources (e.g., cost sharing across programs, grants, other funding sources)? How will the resources be distributed among groups and individual students on the basis of their needs?
6. What, if any, organizational or structural changes are needed in the school or district to support students?
7. How will you communicate the results of this work to critical stakeholders (e.g., parents and students, teachers, administrators, communities, educators outside your district, the state department of education)?
8. How will students and parents be included as part of the EWIMS efforts? How will information be communicated to them?
9. How will the successes of the program and individual students be celebrated?

STEP 6—Monitor Students and Interventions



WHAT YOU NEED FOR STEP 6

- A list of students in interventions
- Time to discuss student progress in interventions
- Tool 2: Dropout-Prevention Intervention Mapping (Appendix B)

DESCRIPTION OF STEP 6

Step 6 includes information about monitoring flagged students and improving both individual student supports and the system of interventions available. It also provides guidance on how to monitor students in interventions by examining whether or not they begin to get back on track (no longer display indicators of risk). In this step, the EWIMS team uses the progress-monitoring information to evaluate the impact of interventions on individual students and on groups of students with common needs.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES FOR STEP 6

1. Knowledge about individual student progress over time and specific responses to assigned interventions, which allows the EWIMS team to make decisions about continuing, reassigning, or terminating interventions for flagged students
2. Identification of gaps in the available supports and interventions for students, recommendations for new intervention strategies, and prioritization of new interventions that are based on EWS data
3. Knowledge about the general effectiveness of interventions, based on data from monitoring students participating in each program
4. Information sharing with appropriate stakeholders about student needs, the impact of existing interventions, and the need for additional interventions if applicable

Monitoring Student Progress and Interventions

- *Monitor students who are participating in interventions.* This monitoring should be done as part of the EWIMS team's routine review of EWS data (Step 3) and should be incorporated as a regular item on the team's agenda. Specifically, students who were previously flagged and assigned to one or more interventions should be monitored closely to see whether they were flagged again and for which indicators. For example, students flagged for attendance problems who were assigned to a program with attendance monitoring should be examined to see whether their attendance rates improved.
- *Identify student needs that are not being met.* Students who are receiving supports may continue to show signs that they are at risk of being off-track for grade level, for promotion to the next grade, and/or for graduation from high school. It is possible that their needs are not being addressed by the interventions for a number of reasons, including the following: the intervention might not be effective; the frequency of the intervention may not be enough; the students have additional needs that have emerged and that are not addressed by the assigned intervention. Regular monitoring allows these issues to be identified quickly.
- *Identify new interventions to meet student needs.* The EWIMS team may need to identify new interventions that are not currently available to meet the needs of students identified as being at risk. First, the team must identify the level of need. Then, the team must conduct a search and develop a list of potential interventions and strategies that may serve the need, pairing the list with the associated costs (e.g., resources, funding, staff time) of implementing the intervention or strategy. After the team shares the level of need and potential solutions with leadership and staff, appropriate intervention(s) can be implemented. New interventions can be added to **Tool 2: Dropout-Prevention Intervention Mapping** (Appendix B).
- *Examine the effectiveness of the interventions.* In addition to enabling users to track the progress of individual students, the EWS Middle Grades Tool allows users to examine intervention programs in terms of whether participating students are able to get back on track. Over time, this process will improve the team's understanding of which interventions are best at addressing specific student needs and enable the team to strengthen the process of matching students to interventions.
- *Communicate with families.* As noted as part of Step 3, both students and their families should be informed about students' risk status. Families should be informed when students appear to make improvements, and they also should be informed when there is lack of improvement or further decline.

DISTRICT ROLE IN STEP 6

The monitoring of individual students occurs at the school level, but the district can play a key role in enhancing the availability of appropriate student interventions by leveraging resources to secure progress-monitoring measures to use throughout the district and by monitoring trends among students within a given year and over time. For example, a district can monitor specific supports/interventions in which students participate and identify the scenarios in which the supports seem to work to get students back on track. The district also may examine whether a specific support/intervention works well for certain students (e.g., students who are failing English language arts or ELL students at risk). In cases where an intervention or support does not seem to be working, the district can examine whether it is a fidelity-of-implementation issue or whether it needs to be dropped from the array of student supports/interventions.

By collecting information on supports and interventions implemented in the schools, the district is in a unique position to help schools and, specifically, EWIMS teams to provide information on how the available supports and interventions meet particular student needs and on their effectiveness. Districts also have the ability to examine these intervention and student data over time and observe the related outcomes (e.g., getting at-risk students back on track or not). Further, districts can allocate resources (e.g., staff, funds) on the basis of student and school needs.

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR STEP 6

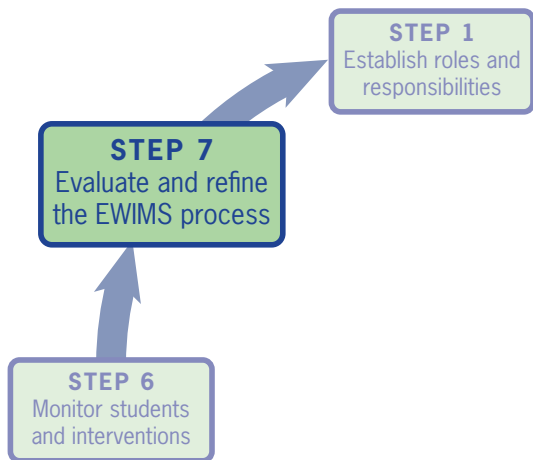
Short-Term Questions

1. Are students who are participating in interventions showing improvement? What evidence is being used (e.g., indicators of risk, other)? Do these students need to continue participating in the intervention to maintain improved outcomes?
2. Are students who are participating in interventions continuing to display indicators of risk? If the students are indicating risk, consider the following:
 - Is the intervention inadequately supporting an individual student or a group of students?
 - Are there problems with how the intervention is being implemented?
 - Is the intervention not addressing the particular needs of students?
 - Does more information about the needs of the student need to be gathered (Step 4) to identify a better fit between interventions and the student's needs (Step 5)?
3. As interventions are implemented, do new student needs arise? Has the number of students flagged for each indicator changed since new strategies have been put in place? How can interventions be modified or replaced?
4. Are resources sufficient to implement supports and interventions? If not, how might additional resources be identified for the short-term?

Long-Term Questions

1. During the course of several years, do trends in the data consistently identify the need for similar types of interventions? Do school or district policies and strategies exist that may address these needs?
2. What interventions seem to get students back on track consistently?
3. During the course of several years, how effective are the existing interventions for improving outcomes for students who are assigned to them? Are some interventions better for addressing students with particular types of risk indicators or other underlying causes?
 - What interventions seem to work for which students?
 - What interventions do not seem to work for students? How might these interventions be improved? Should these interventions be eliminated?
4. How will you communicate the results of this work to critical stakeholders (e.g., parents and students, teachers, administrators, community, educators outside your district, the state department of education)?
5. What schoolwide policies need to be in place to improve the implementation of student support/intervention strategies?
6. Are resources sufficient to implement supports and interventions, given that you now have an efficient process for identifying needs? If not, how might additional resources be identified for the long-term?
7. Do you think there are organizational or structural changes needed in the school or district to support students? If so, what change(s) do you recommend?

STEP 7—Evaluate and Refine the EWIMS Process



WHAT YOU NEED FOR STEP 7

- Reports generated by the EWS Middle Grades Tool
- Time to consider and identify ways to improve the EWIMS process
- Exported data from the EWIMS Middle Grades Tool to prepare for students in the next grade (e.g., students moving from Grade 6 to Grade 7, students who are transitioning to high school, and so forth)

DESCRIPTION OF STEP 7

Step 7 indicates that the EWIMS team should reflect on the EWIMS implementation process on an annual basis (at minimum). The team should discuss what has worked, what should be modified, and what should be replaced or eliminated. Each decision should be supported by data and evidence and should be documented. Finally, the current EWIMS team and other school and district leadership should identify new EWIMS team members and ensure that they are trained to use the EWS Middle Grades Tool and that they understand the implementation process.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES FOR STEP 7

1. Shared understanding of the EWIMS process implementation strengths and challenges
2. Clear recommendations for improving the EWIMS process
3. Established EWIMS team for the following school year, composed of members with a clear understanding of the process and of their roles
4. Validated indicators that substantiate the EWS data in the school and district

Evaluating and Refining the EWIMS Process

When evaluating the EWIMS process, all aspects of EWIMS implementation should be considered. The conversation should be guided by exploring what is working, what is not working, and how the work of the EWIMS team could be improved. This examination can range from exploring an analysis of the risk indicators and risk thresholds to ensuring that the team is able to access reports in a timely and efficient manner.

Locally Validating the EWS Indicators

The EWIMS team may want to explore locally validating the EWS risk indicators to determine the extent to which they are accurately predicting students who are off track for grade level, promotion to the next grade, and/or graduation from high school. To conduct this analysis, a member of the EWIMS team or a designee with experience in data analysis would need access to at least three years of data (to explore grade retention outcome) to seven years of data (to explore the high school graduation outcome) for at least two classes of students who have graduated from or dropped out of high school (e.g., Grades 6–8 student data for the class of 2011 and the class of 2012). The analysis would enable team members to examine the outcomes for students who did and did not display the EWS risk indicators earlier in the middle grades.

Ideally, the indicators in the system should predict a high percentage of eventual graduates and dropouts. That is, if the EWS indicators would have flagged most of the students who dropped out and would not have flagged most of the students who graduated, the indicators would have a high “hit rate” or accurately predict the outcome (e.g., students graduated or dropped out of high school). However, if most students who would have been flagged earlier in the middle grades ended up graduating from high school, the system may be overidentifying students at risk. If many students who eventually dropped out would not have been flagged using these indicators, the system may be underidentifying students at risk.

Using multiple years of data to use to examine these percentages is critical to testing the predictive power of the EWS indicators and thresholds for the local context. If the examination of the EWS indicators shows that the system is not very predictive in the local context, modification of the indicators or the thresholds/benchmarks might be warranted. For example, in some districts, flagging students who miss 10 percent of instructional time may be a more accurate indicator of risk than using the EWS Middle Grades Tool's default 20 percent.⁹

DISTRICT ROLE IN STEP 7

District administrators may be more able to effectively resolve particular issues or challenges than staff at the school level. For example, a district may decide to take responsibility for ensuring that the school-level EWS Middle Grades Tool is populated with student data in a timely manner. A district team member also may be able to assist districtwide in planning for professional development opportunities to increase the effectiveness of implementation efforts for staff and teachers who need more training on the EWIMS process.

An additional role of the district is to lead or facilitate the validation analysis (described in the sidebar “Locally Validating the EWS Indicators” at the top of this page) to ensure that the EWS data are as accurate and predictive as possible for the local context. Because the district houses student-level information across schools over multiple years, it is well positioned to put together a database that can clearly answer questions about the degree to which each indicator is predictive of the on-track or off-track outcome (promotion to the next grade and/or high school graduation).

⁹ See Heppen and Therriault (2008) and Jerald (2006) for additional resources and information on validating EWS indicators. If the indicators are not considered predictive enough, further technical assistance should be sought to use local data to refine the indicators and the thresholds for risk identification.

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR STEP 7

The guiding questions for Step 7 encourage EWIMS teams to reflect on each of the six previous steps.

Short-Term Questions

STEP 1—Establish Roles and Responsibilities

1. Who will continue to be on the EWIMS team? (Note: Some individuals should overlap from year to year to ensure continuity over time.) Who will leave?
2. Which other stakeholder groups need to be represented on the EWIMS team?
3. What recommendations do you have for establishing a new team? For instance:
 - How frequently should the EWIMS team meet?
 - How much time in meetings and out of meetings do individual members need to participate in EWIMS-related activities?
 - What resources could support the team (e.g., providing EWIMS team members an additional prep period)?
4. What were the biggest challenges the team faced (e.g., importing data into the tool, finding the time to meet as a team)? What were the biggest successes?
5. What advice do you have for future EWIMS teams? What successes and challenges have the EWIMS team members experienced and addressed?
6. What made the team's job easier? What changes could make the team's job even easier?

STEP 2—Use the EWS Middle Grades Tool

7. How would you improve use of the tool (e.g., change the risk-indicator thresholds and the processes for keeping the tool up-to-date)?

STEP 3—Review the EWS Data

8. How would you improve the tool's reports and their use?

STEP 4—Interpret the EWS Data

9. What additional data were important for identifying underlying causes?
10. What advice would you give to someone who is new to analyzing the data?
11. Were there any unintended (negative or positive) consequences for students or staff because of the type of information that came from the EWS Middle Grades Tool?
12. Did you learn any new strategies that supported the interpretation of the EWS data?

STEP 5—Assign and Provide Interventions

13. What existing strategies ensured that students got back on track or were headed in that direction?
14. Did your analysis of the EWS data and your interpretation techniques allow you to match students to appropriate interventions?

(Continued)

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR STEP 7 (Continued)

Short-Term Questions

STEP 6—Monitor Students and Interventions

15. How did existing supports and/or interventions for students who were flagged as at-risk help students get back on track or headed in that direction? Were there strategies that were better suited for groups of students (on the basis of their needs)?
16. Which strategies are still needed to support students as they get back on track for graduation?

Long-Term Questions

1. What policies, organizational systems, or approaches at the school and district levels facilitated more effective supports and interventions?
2. By looking at multiple years of data for the same class(es) or cohort(s) of students over time, how does the school or district validate the EWS indicators of risk?
 - How many or what percentage of students who were not flagged wound up not graduating with their cohort or dropping out?
 - How many or what percentage of students who were flagged graduated on time?¹⁰
 - Do the percentages show any trends within the district or in an individual school? If trends are apparent, do the trends continue over time?
3. Do the EWS data reveal systemic problems in the district or school (e.g., risk factors that are prevalent from year to year, schools with persistent problems, groups of students who are consistently identified)?

¹⁰ These retrospective percentages determine the “hit rate” of the EWS indicators.

Conclusion

The seven-step middle grades EWIMS implementation process provides an organizing framework for schools and districts to use in implementing an early warning system. These steps can guide users in examining indicator data for middle grades students who are at risk of being retained and/or of dropping out of high school, matching them to appropriate supports and interventions, and monitoring their progress. Each step specifies the roles for personnel at both the school level and the district level to create and maintain organized and coordinated approaches to getting students back on track. Guiding questions for each step allow users to focus on a range of short- and long-term needs, help users examine the needs of specific students, and help EWIMS teams identify underlying systemic school and district issues that can be improved to keep students on track for promotion and graduation. Using the framework serves individuals in schools and districts by guiding the development of a comprehensive and systematic dropout-prevention process that can help keep students in school, support efforts to identify the most promising interventions in specific schools and districts, and—ultimately—raise graduation rates around the country.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For additional information about early warning systems and dropout prevention, please see the following National High School Center resources.

- *Early Warning System Middle Grades Tool*
http://www.betterhighschools.org/EWS_middle.asp
Developed by the National High School Center at AIR, the EWS Middle Grades Tool is a free, downloadable, Excel-based tool designed to allow users to identify and monitor students who show early warning signs that they are at risk for dropping out of high school. This tool assists users in monitoring the progress of students during the course of the school year (as early as the first 20 or 30 days of school and after every grading period). It relies on readily available student-level data (attendance and course performance) that may be imported or entered into the Excel-based tool. As these data are entered, the tool automatically calculates indicators that are predictive of whether students are on track to graduate from high school.
- *Early Warning System Middle Grades Tool Source File Collators*
http://www.betterhighschools.org/EWS_middle.asp
Developed by the National High School Center at AIR, the source file collators are an ideal way to consolidate student data into a source file that can be easily imported into the EWS Middle Grades Tool. A Middle Grades Student Information Collator and a Middle Grades Student Performance Data Collator are available. These collators are particularly helpful for schools or districts that maintain various pieces of student data in different student information systems or that are unable to generate a single report with all the student information in the specific order required by the source files. Each free, downloadable, Microsoft Excel-based file includes instructions for use.
- *Developing Early Warning Systems to Identify Potential High School Dropouts* (Issue Brief)
http://www.betterhighschools.org/pubs/documents/IssueBrief_EarlyWarningSystemsGuide.pdf
This resource discusses the factors that help predict the probability that individual students will eventually drop out of high school prior to graduating. It includes step-by-step instructions for building an early warning system.

- *Approaches to Dropout Prevention: Heeding Early Warning Signs With Appropriate Interventions*

http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_ApproachesToDropoutPrevention.pdf

This report outlines steps that schools can take to identify at-risk students and provide the necessary support systems and relevant interventions to assist students in obtaining high school diplomas. Further, the report discusses the use of early warning data systems to target interventions for groups and individual students, offers a variety of best practice approaches undertaken by higher performing high schools, and presents effective programs that are currently being implemented to stem the dropout problem.

- *Early Warning System High School Tool*

http://www.betterhighschools.org/EWS_tool.asp

Developed by the National High School Center at AIR, the EWS High School Tool is a free, downloadable, Excel-based tool designed to allow users to identify and monitor students who show early warning signs of being at risk for dropping out of high school. This tool assists users in monitoring the progress of students during the course of the school year (as early as the first 20 or 30 days of school and after every grading period). It relies on readily available student-level data (attendance, course failures, grade point average, and credit accumulation) that may be imported or entered into the Excel-based tool. As these data are entered, the tool automatically calculates indicators that are predictive of whether students will graduate from high school or drop out.

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Appendix A. The District's Role in the Implementation of EWIMS

Although this publication is explicitly designed to guide EWIMS implementation at the school level, experience working with states, districts, and schools suggests that the role of the district in EWIMS implementation is critical. The following summary indicates the district's role in EWIMS implementation, as organized by EWIMS steps.

STEP 1: ESTABLISH ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

District representation and participation in EWIMS teams is essential. Ideally, a district representative should participate on each school-based EWIMS team. However, the number and composition of EWIMS teams in a district may depend on the size of the district. Large districts with many schools may have one school-based team at each school and another district-level team with both school and district representation. Smaller districts may have one school-based team in each school, with both school and district representation.

The role of the district is to identify systemwide concerns and develop and recommend districtwide changes that address these concerns. District administrators also play a key role in communicating the importance of EWIMS within and across schools, through professional development and by monitoring school-level efforts. Districts should consider the following roles:

- *Engage in school-level meetings or routinely communicate with EWIMS teams* to increase attention to the EWIMS efforts and signify the importance of the EWIMS work.
- *Provide EWIMS team members with professional development on implementing EWIMS and using EWS data* to enhance the work of the school EWIMS team and decrease the variation in the quality of the EWIMS team's work across schools.
- *Monitor school efforts to implement EWIMS throughout the school year, at multiple grade levels (middle and high school grades), and during the course of multiple school years* to ensure that schools are improving outcomes for students and to identify promising practices and areas of need in the district as a whole.

In large districts, it may be practical to have a district EWIMS team in addition to the school-level teams. A district team should include at least one key representative from each school-level team. A district team may meet less frequently than the school-based teams (e.g., two to four times a year) to discuss persistent challenges, resources, and strategies for supporting students—as well as systemic, organization, and policy changes that may be needed. The school-level representatives can help the district team develop new districtwide strategies for at-risk students (e.g., new behavioral management approaches or training for teachers and students, increased professional development in adolescent literacy).

STEP 2: USE THE EWS MIDDLE GRADES TOOL

The district can do the following to support the use of the EWS Middle Grades Tool:

- *Provide professional development* in using the EWS Middle Grades Tool (either directly or through a third party) to team members.
- *Provide technical assistance* by regularly backing up the tool and disseminating reports to the school-based team.
- *Align the district data systems and variables with the EWS Middle Grades Tool data variables* to streamline the efforts of the school EWIMS team (e.g., developing a script that enables the data to be exported easily from the student information system to the EWS Middle Grades Tool). This step will allow team members to focus on supporting students rather than on managing data or double-entering information.
- *Provide guidance about indicators of risk and then set thresholds* at which students are flagged.
- *Provide information to EWIMS teams about the incoming indicators of risk* (especially if students are coming from other schools within the district).

STEP 3: ANALYZE THE EWS DATA

Information from the EWS Middle Grades Tool has immediate implications for staff and students in the school; however, at the district level, there is an opportunity to examine these data for a whole school or the whole district. For example, are students who are flagged as at-risk in the first grading period coming from a particular elementary school or set of elementary schools? The information from the EWS Middle Grades Tool can illuminate trends in students' indicators of risk for further exploration; in addition, this information may influence how resources are allocated or how policies and strategies are implemented in order to focus on issues that are particular to students within the district. The district also can help the EWIMS team review longitudinal data to clarify if there are trends across grades or among groups of flagged students.

STEP 4: INTERPRET THE EWS DATA

Interpreting the EWS data requires access to student information beyond that data housed in the EWS Middle Grades Tool. District administrators can support these efforts by developing policies that give EWIMS team members or their designees access to information so that they are able to make informed decisions about student needs. This access may require the availability of students' records prior to the current grade, including elementary school grades, attendance, behavioral information, and other data that can help EWIMS teams better understand their flagged students.

STEP 5: ASSIGN STUDENTS TO INTERVENTIONS

The perspective of the district allows longer term solutions and strategies across schools. The district can do the following to support EWIMS teams in identifying appropriate interventions:

- *Identify common needs of students* across multiple schools.
- *Pinpoint districtwide solutions for common needs* across schools.
- *Provide solutions* for gaps in available interventions and supports.
- *Allocate resources* on the basis of identified needs within specific schools.
- *Support pre-middle grades interventions to improve student readiness* for the middle grades and high school (e.g., elementary and middle grades interventions).

Districts also have a role to play in facilitating the use of promising support and intervention programs. Through work with and as a part of EWIMS teams, district personnel can play key roles in identifying promising student supports and interventions as well as sharing effective support and intervention practices across schools.

STEP 6: MONITOR STUDENTS IN INTERVENTIONS

The monitoring of individual students occurs at the school level, but the district can play a key role in enhancing the availability of appropriate student interventions by leveraging resources to secure progress-monitoring measures to use throughout the district and by monitoring trends among students within a given year and over time. For example, a district can monitor specific supports/interventions in which students participate and identify the scenarios in which the supports seem to work to get students back on track. The district also may examine whether a specific support/intervention works well for certain students (e.g., students who are failing English language arts or ELL students at risk). In cases where an intervention or support does not seem to be working, the district can examine whether it is a fidelity-of-implementation issue or whether it needs to be dropped from the array of student supports/interventions.

By collecting information on supports and interventions implemented in the schools, the district is in a unique position to help schools and, specifically, EWIMS teams provide information on how the available supports and interventions meet particular student needs as well as the effectiveness of interventions. Districts also have the ability to examine these intervention and student data over time and observe the related outcomes (e.g., getting at-risk students back on track or not). Further, districts can allocate resources (e.g., staff, funds) on the basis of student and school needs.

STEP 7: EVALUATE AND REFINE THE EWIMS PROCESS

District administrators may be more able to effectively resolve particular issues or challenges than staff at the school level. For example, a district may decide to take responsibility for ensuring that the school-level EWS Middle Grades Tool is populated with student data in a timely manner. A district team member also may be able to assist districtwide planning for professional development opportunities to increase the effectiveness of implementation efforts for staff and teachers who need more training on the EWIMS process.

An additional role of the district is to lead or facilitate the validation analysis (described in the sidebar “Locally Validation the EWS Indicators” on page 29) to ensure that the EWS data are as accurate and predictive as possible for the local context. Because the district houses student-level information across schools over multiple years, it is well positioned to put together a database that can answer clearly questions about the degree to which each indicator is predictive of the on-track or off-track outcome (promotion to the next grade and/or high school graduation).

Appendix B. Supporting Documents

TOOL 1: EWIMS ACTION-PLANNING TOOL (USED IN STEP 1)

**TOOL 2: DROPOUT-PREVENTION INTERVENTION MAPPING
(USED IN STEP 5 AND STEP 6)**

TOOL 1: EWIMS ACTION-PLANNING TOOL

Instructions: The school and/or district early warning intervention and monitoring system (EWIMS) team can use this tool to begin planning and implementing an early warning system to identify middle grades students who may be at risk of dropping out of high school later.

SCHOOL/DISTRICT: _____ DATE: _____

Step	What do you have in place?	What do you need?	What are your next steps? <i>(assign individuals to be responsible for these actions)</i>
1. Establish Roles and Responsibilities			
2. Use the EWS Early Warning System Tool			
3. Review the EWS Data			
4. Interpret the EWS Data			
5. Assign and Provide Interventions			
6. Monitor Students and Interventions			
7. Evaluate and Refine the EWS Process			

TOOL 2: DROPOUT-PREVENTION INTERVENTION MAPPING

Instructions: In Column 1, list the existing or new dropout-prevention interventions/strategies in your school or district. In Columns 2 and 3, use the codes to indicate which description best captures the intervention. In Columns 4–14, mark an X in the column(s) that the intervention addresses.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
School/District: _____ Date: _____	Tier (I = Universal, II = Targeted, III = Individualized)	A = Attendance, B = Behavioral, AC = Academic	Focus on achievement in core courses.	Focus on schoolwide behavior.	Develop content recovery courses.	Use tutoring as an academic support.	Use attendance and behavior monitors.	Use advisories and team teaching.	Provide counseling and mentoring.	Personalize learning (e.g., small learning communities).	Create partnerships between high schools and feeder middle schools.	Support students with disabilities outside of school.	Engage families.
Example: Achievement for Latinos Through Academic Success (ALAS)	I	B/AC	X	X			X		X				X

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14		
School/District: _____ Date: _____	Tier (I = Universal, II = Targeted, III = Individualized)	A = Attendance, B = Behavioral, AC = Academic	Focus on achievement in core courses.	Focus on schoolwide behavior.	Develop content recovery courses.	Use tutoring as an academic support.	Use attendance and behavior monitors.	Use advisories and team teaching.	Provide counseling and mentoring.	Personalize learning (e.g., small learning communities).	Create partnerships between high schools and feeder middle schools.	Support students with disabilities outside of school.	Engage families.		

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14		
School/District: _____ Date: _____	Tier (I = Universal, II = Targeted, III = Individualized)	A = Attendance, B = Behavioral, AC = Academic	Focus on achievement in core courses.	Focus on schoolwide behavior.	Develop content recovery courses.	Use tutoring as an academic support.	Use attendance and behavior monitors.	Use advisories and team teaching.	Provide counseling and mentoring.	Personalize learning (e.g., small learning communities).	Create partnerships between high schools and feeder middle schools.	Support students with disabilities outside of school.	Engage families.		

ABOUT THIS GUIDE AND THE NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL CENTER

The *Middle Grades Early Warning Intervention Monitoring System Implementation Guide* is offered by the National High School Center, operated by American Institutes for Research (AIR). The National High School Center is a central source of information and expertise on high school improvement issues, and it does not endorse any interventions or conduct field studies. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the National High School Center serves the regional comprehensive centers in their work to build the capacity of states across the nation to effectively implement the goals of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act relating to secondary schools.

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