

## EWS Fundamentals: Building a team

### Welcome Screen

Welcome to the first of four modules that will help you implement Early Warning Systems or EWS. An EWS is a powerful way to combine a variety of data into one comprehensive, easy-to-use system for tracking dropout prevention. The modules will help your team use an EWS to:

- Place students in more effective interventions earlier in their school career
- Identify struggling students when they first start to have trouble
- Proactively address gaps found in subgroups of students in real time
- Evaluate which interventions produce the best student outcomes

To get started, please make sure that you have access to a text editor

This page includes an illustrated image of a non-descript student in distress, surrounded by notebooks, loose leaf paper and exclamation marks.

### Intro screen

Early Warning Systems are one way to establish routines for accessing and interpreting data, with the ultimate goal of improving student outcomes. Module 1 establishes the base structures your team will need as part of the EWS planning process. It provides activities the team should complete as part of the planning process.

- Develop Your Team
  - Establish a structure
  - Identify individual members
  - Define roles
  - Define appropriate goals
- Define Appropriate Indicators
  - Understand what makes a good indicator
  - Identify indicators within your local context
- Additional Resources & Next Steps
  - Consider additional resources to support your EWS
  - Establish a meeting schedule
  - Prepare for the next module
  - Participate in a community forum

This page includes an illustrated image of three non-descript students. One student is smiling, standing on a green arrow pointed up. Another student is standing with a blank face on a yellow arrow pointed out. The last student is looking concerned, standing on a red arrow pointed down with their book bag trailing behind them.

### Develop Your Team: Establish a structure

EWS teams identify off-track students, assign interventions, and monitor progress. Teams can be formed at either the district or school level, depending on how centralized implementation will be. A mixed-team approach includes both school- and district-level teams. Whichever approach you take, good communication structures are essential.

After reading the following descriptions, choose the team structure you'll use to complete this module today. Each team will complete the module separately.

- District-Level Team Approach
  - Defines the EWS indicators and appropriate interventions for all schools in the district
  - Consists of district- and building- level leaders from every school, along with community partners
  - Strong centralized control of school processes
  - Choose this if creating a district-level team now
- School-Level Team Approach
  - Each building has a team to carry out work independently from the district
  - Each school adapts reporting to the context of their data and interventions
  - Most useful when a district has multiple schools with large student populations, and when each school has historically taken a unique approach to dropout prevention
  - Choose this if creating a school-level team now
- Mixed-Team Approach
  - EWS work is carried out by both a district team and separate school teams
  - School teams meet independently every one to two weeks
  - District team meets less frequently to discuss progress and strategies implemented in the schools

Please open up the text editor of your choice. In your text editor, document the team approach you will be focusing on today. Note that the mixed-team description is for informational purposes only.

Develop your team: Identify individual members

Roles and responsibilities can differ depending on the approach you chose. From the list below, add the names of staff members, including those who will be “to be determined,” that you will recruit for your EWS team. The next step will be linking each team member to specific responsibilities.

- Program Coordinator
  - Typically serves as the team leader by facilitating meetings. Keeps track of the mapping between indicators and available interventions. Ensures compliance with overall mission.
- School-Team Leader
  - Serves as the school's liaison with other schools and the district. A school administrator or principal may serve as the team leader. If a principal cannot serve as the school-team leader, he or she should still attend meetings regularly to stay engaged in the process, knowledgeable about school data and student context, and active in determining interventions.
- District-Level Leader

- Disseminates accomplishments and challenges. Advocates for policy change at district level.
- IT Staff
  - Inputs data, collaborates on report structures, builds reports, updates data.
- School Counselor
  - Represents student voice, relays what is working effectively on a day-to-day basis.
- Representatives from different stakeholder groups (for example, content-area teachers, special education teachers, ELL instructors, equity coordinators, parent organizations, and student organizations).
  - Serve as advisors and provide insight into how the system is working for the variety of stakeholders. Some EWS teams rotate members on an regular basis.

In your text editor, create a header entitled, “Our Team”. Under the header, please list the staff that will be on your team.

### Develop Your Team: Our Responsibilities

Below is a list of general responsibilities. This activity is designed for you to be able to link your team members to each one. You can add more responsibilities to the general list, but try to keep them broad. The purpose of this activity is to identify potential gaps in staffing your EWS team.

- In your text editor, please type the header:
  - Perform data entry, updates, and report building
  - Now enter staff who will given this responsibility
- In your text editor, please type the header:
  - Engage teachers, parents, and students in EWS initiatives
  - Now enter staff who will given this responsibility
- In your text editor, please type the header:
  - Document and coordinate available interventions
  - Now enter staff who will given this responsibility
- In your text editor, please type the header:
  - Teach staff how to use the reports
  - Now enter staff who will given this responsibility
- In your text editor, please type the header:
  - Coordinate initiatives at the school
  - Now enter staff who will given this responsibility
- In your text editor, please type the header:
  - Coordinate information sharing with the district
  - Now enter staff who will given this responsibility
- In your text editor, continue adding or deleting other responsibilities you think will be applicable and then type the staff who will given this responsibility

### Develop your team: Define appropriate goals

The overarching goal of an EWS is to decrease dropouts and increase graduation rates but key objectives to reach that goal can blur when convening many different stakeholders. Use the S.M.A.R.T. framework to set realistic goals for the coming year.

- What is the difference between a goal, an objective, and a strategy?

- **Goals:** The overarching accomplishment you are working toward. Example: “We want to decrease the number of students who dropout by half over the next two years.”
- **Objectives:** A series of smaller steps that will help accomplish the goal. Objectives should be stated as actionable steps. Example: “We will increase daily attendance to 95% in two years” or “We will close the GPA gap between low socioeconomic status (SES) students and high SES students by 10% in the next two years.”
- **Strategies:** Define how each objective will be achieved through a thoughtfully constructed, step-by-step plan. A good plan includes who will be in charge of each strategy and a timeline for achieving the outcome. Example: “Create an attendance policy that includes face-to-face meetings with families after students miss more than five consecutive days of class. The school counselor will manage and establish this policy over the next two months.”
- SMART goals encompass a combination of goals, objectives, and strategies.
- SMART is an acronym for teams to think about when setting goals
  - S – SPECIFIC
    - Is the goal specific? What will the goal do? Who will carry it out?
  - M – MEASURABLE
    - Is the goal measurable? How will you know you’ve achieved it?
  - A – ACHIEVABLE
    - Is the goal achievable? Given your timeframe, is it a reasonable expectation or outcome?
  - R – RELEVANT
    - Is the goal relevant to performance expectations? Is it linked to dropout prevention or graduation initiatives?
  - T – TIMELY
    - Is the goal time-bound? How often will you do this task? When will this goal be accomplished?

In your text editor, type the header, “Establishing Our Goal”. Underneath the header, please type a description of your goal, objectives and strategies.

Define Appropriate Indicators: Understand what makes a good indicator

It’s best to start with a small set of indicators. After establishing this base, teams can assess whether additional indicators might lead to more accurate identification of off-track students. If an indicator identifies relatively few new students over time, consider dropping it. Remember, each new indicator requires a change in reporting formats, more data to analyze, and additional interventions to help students improve.

Common Indicators Used

- A – Attendance: There’s a strong relationship between missing school and the probability of graduating in four years. Students who do not regularly attend class typically fall behind in their coursework and see their grades suffer. Poor attendance may also indicate that a student is struggling with health, family, or other issues.

- B – Behavior Incidences: As little as one suspension has strong predictive power in on-time graduation. Behavior incidents and suspensions can indicate disengagement from the school environment and can cause additional problems due to missed coursework.
- C- Course Performance: Failing a course implies that the student will need to make up credit to stay on track with his or her classmates. Poor course performance and GPA can also indicate disengagement.

Define Appropriate Indicators: Identify indicators within your local context  
Think about each indicator you want to include in your EWS report. Complete the checklist of questions below to see if you are ready to begin using each indicator. This will identify potential problems that may need to be addressed before undertaking the next module.

### Defining Our Indicators

- In your text editor, type the header, “Attendance”
  - Underneath the header, type whether the data is or is not currently in a useable format.
  - Next type whether there are additional resources you will need to make the data accessible.
  - Finally, type who is responsible for maintaining it.
- In your text editor, type the header, “Behavior Incidences”
  - Underneath the header, type whether the data is or is not currently in a useable format.
  - Next type whether there are additional resources you will need to make the data accessible.
  - Finally, type who is responsible for maintaining it.
- In your text editor, type the header, “Course Performance”
  - Underneath the header, type whether the data is or is not currently in a useable format.
  - Next type whether there are additional resources you will need to make the data accessible.
  - Finally, type who is responsible for maintaining it.

This page includes an illustrated image of a non-descript smiling student walking up some stairs to a hallway. The hallway has a sign that says, “Free Transportation” with a directional arrow pointing up, “1<sup>st</sup> Period Check-In” with a directional arrow pointing straight ahead, and “Counselor” with a directional arrow pointing down. The student has a thought bubble coming from their head which says, “Attendance problems”.

Additional Resources & Next Steps: Consider additional resources to support your EWS

You may be wondering, “What if we need more support to fund professional development or hire more staff?” Nationally, schools and districts have bridged these needs by partnering with other organizations. Read about strategies that have worked for districts.

### Examples of what others have done

- Metro Nashville Public Schools used Race to the Top funding to employ one oversight coordinator for the EWS and 12 data coaches, one for each school cluster. The school-based data coaches built a culture among teachers and counselors for understanding student, classroom, and school-level EWS data, and using it to guide intervention efforts.
- In Alabama, the state deploys 25 state-trained data coaches to “high need” schools identified through the statewide accountability system. The state also runs professional

development sessions on coaching students for graduation. Staff members use tools from the workshops to guide their EWS team efforts.

- In the ABC Today! Program, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Eastern Missouri provided a “director of impact” position in five St. Louis area public schools. Their role was to facilitate meetings and lead the EWS team. The program’s success then inspired Wells Fargo Advisors to contribute financial and technical resources, including systems for transferring data between the district and Big Brothers Big Sisters. This increased the organization’s capacity to identify and intervene with students who were off track.
- The Diplomas Now program partners with Communities in Schools, which provides a “school transformation facilitator” to assist schools in their EWS implementation. The full-time position is responsible for compiling data and facilitating biweekly EWS meetings. Diplomas Now also partners with City Year, which provides AmeriCorps members who serve as full-time tutors, mentors, and role models for students identified through the EWS.
- In January 2013, Graduation Matters invited districts to apply for grants of up to \$10,000 to replicate successful dropout prevention strategies. The Graduation Matters team has created two toolkits for starting an initiative in the community and for partnering with businesses. The “Starting a Graduation Matters Montana Initiative in Your Town” toolkit contains resources for engaging community organizations and businesses in a districtwide effort to prevent dropouts. It features worksheets for reporting local data in a clear, understandable format to help districts illuminate the impact of dropouts on the community.

Additional Resources & Next Steps: Establish a meeting schedule

EWS teams have different meeting schedules depending on their team structure and responsibilities. When planning meetings, think about frequency, convenient meeting space and technology requirements.

Here are some examples of how different districts/states or organizations have established their meetings:

- Houston Independent School District meets to create intervention plans and to discuss student progress
  - Team level: School-level approach
  - Team composition: Each school has a Dropout Recovery, Intervention, and Prevention Committee comprising assistant principals, teachers, college access coordinators, clerks, police officers, and counselors
  - Meeting schedule: Weekly
- ABC Today! Program partners with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Eastern Missouri to hold meetings with various groups to update administrators and involve them in reviewing student data, trends, and outcomes
  - Team level: Mixed-team approach
  - Meeting schedule: Weekly with school teams, monthly with school principals, and quarterly with district leaders
- At Diplomas Now, a school transformation facilitator organizes meetings to interpret the data and design and plan effective interventions
  - Team level: School-level approach

- Team composition: Teams of teachers who share common groups of students and other student support staff
  - Meeting schedule: Biweekly
- Sioux Falls School District shares the responsibility of monitoring students and assigning them to appropriate interventions.
  - Team level: District-level approach
  - Team composition: Four teachers, two school counselors, a school social worker, three elementary principals, two middle school principals, four curriculum services and special services administrators, and two instructional support services administrators
  - Meeting schedule: Data updated weekly to monitor effectiveness of interventions

#### Our Meeting Structure

- In your text editor, please type, “We plan to meet this frequently” then type how often you plan to meet.
- In your text editor, please type, “Potential locations for us to meet include” then type some meeting locations your group can access.

#### Additional Resources & Next Steps: Prepare for the next module

To prepare for the next module, think about the activities you have completed: Did you identify gaps? Will you need to recruit more team members? Will you approach schools about starting their own teams?

- In your text editor, document what areas you need to address before the next meeting. Please list each one, including which team member will be responsible for following up on it.

The next course module will go more in depth about indicators and reporting. To get the most out of the module, please:

- Invite all team members, even if they were unable to participate today
- Decide which indicators you will use during the first year of your EWS
- Identify how long the data have been collected and if they are consistently available at the student level

#### Additional Resources & Next Steps: Conclusion

- Print or save a copy of the information you entered
- Please contact Sarah Frazelle at [sarah.frazelle@educationnorthwest.org](mailto:sarah.frazelle@educationnorthwest.org) if you are interested in participating in an EWS community forum
- Additional resources:
  - The content of these modules is based on the IES report [A Practitioner's Guide to Implementing Early Warning Systems](#). The guide provides more details and references for each section.
  - [An Early Warning System](#)
  - [High School EWS Implementation Guide](#)
  - [Learning What It Takes](#)