About the National High School Center
The National High School Center at the American Institutes for Research (AIR) serves as a central source of information and expertise on high school improvement for the Regional Comprehensive Centers (RCCs) and the states they serve, as well as high school stakeholders across the nation. Jointly funded by the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) and the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) at the U.S. Department of Education, the National High School Center provides the latest research, user-friendly tools and products, and high-quality technical assistance on high school improvement issues. Through our work, we aim to ensure that all students perform to their fullest potential and are adequately prepared for college, work, and life after high school.

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Why Are Early Warning Systems Important?
Early warning systems rely on data that are readily available and maintained by a school—such as attendance and course performance—and are good predictors of whether a student may have the potential for dropping out of high school.

Schools can use information from an early warning system to support students who are at risk of dropping out with both school-wide strategies and targeted interventions.

Districts and schools can use early warning system data to examine school-level patterns in the current school year and over time, in order to address systemic issues that may be impeding a student’s ability to graduate.

What are Early Warning Systems?
The United States high school dropout problem has been called a national crisis, with only 74.9% of public high school students graduating with a diploma in 2008.1 With states and districts under mounting pressure to raise graduation rates, there is increasing urgency to obtain more accurate and timely data to systematically identify students most likely to drop out of high school so that dropout prevention supports can be offered to get them back on track to graduate. Early warning systems can help educators predict which students may be in danger of dropping out of high school by using indicators based on readily available school-level data (e.g., attendance and course performance).

To facilitate the establishment and use of early warning systems across the nation, the National High School Center has developed an Early Warning System Implementation Guide and a free downloadable Microsoft Excel-based tool, the Early Warning System (EWS) Tool v2.0.2 The EWS Tool v2.0 is based on research on the academic and behavioral predictors of dropout and can be used by schools, districts, and states to identify students who are at risk for dropping out of high school.

EWS Tool v2.0: Risk Indicator Summary Report
This school-wide report, produced by the National High School Center’s EWS Tool v2.0, shows the number of students who are flagged and not flagged for each indicator of risk during a selected grading period or time frame (e.g., attendance and course performance).

2The National High School Center released a first version of an Early Warning System Tool in 2008, now referred to as EWS Tool v1.0.
Implementing an Early Warning System

Implementing an early warning system is a promising approach to effective dropout prevention and is supported by recent field research. The National High School Center has devised a seven-step implementation process to support the establishment and implementation of early warning systems for identifying and monitoring students who are at risk for dropping out of high school.

Early Warning System Implementation Process

The process, shown in the diagram above, is based on research about data-driven decision-making. Each of the seven steps is depicted as distinct, but they are intended to be part of a cyclical process over the course of a school year. This data-driven decision-making process focuses users on the key early warning indicators and encourages discussions about individual students who are showing signs of risk for dropping out of high school. The steps guide users to make informed decisions about how to support at-risk students and how to continue to monitor their progress over time. In addition to focusing on individual students, the process guides users to examine the success of specific support interventions and to examine possible systemic issues (e.g., school climate) that may relate to dropout trends.

Features of the EWS Tool v2.0

Some of the features of the EWS Tool v2.0 include the capability to:

- Import and/or enter student demographic and performance data;
- Include a locally defined pre-high school indicator that is based on students’ performance data in middle grades;
- House an inventory of dropout prevention (and related) interventions available to students;
- Record information about assignments of students to intervention programs;
- Monitor student response to and progress in the interventions;
- Create multiple graphical and tabular reporting options that allow users to quickly access school-level summary reports, detailed student-level reports (see screenshot below), and individual student reports; and
- Use pre-set or customized reporting features.

EWS Tool v2.0: Student Risk Status

This screenshot of the EWS Tool v2.0 shows one way the tool identifies students who are at risk. The tool highlights the at-risk students’ names in red, as well as the indicators and time frames for which each student has been flagged.

Indicators and Thresholds in the EWS Tool v2.0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Indicator</th>
<th>Timeframe(s)</th>
<th>Risk Indicator Threshold (Flagged)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>First 20/30 days; End of each grading period; End of year</td>
<td>Mixed 10% or more of instructional time (absences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Failures</td>
<td>End of each grading period; End of year</td>
<td>Failed one or more semester course (any subject)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>End of each grading period; End of year</td>
<td>Achieved 2.0 or lower (on a 4-point scale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consortium on Chicago School’s End of Year (On-track) Indicator</td>
<td>End of year</td>
<td>Failed two or more semester core courses, or accumulated fewer credits than the number required for promotion to the next grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If a student’s performance falls below a given threshold, the student is flagged as being “at risk.” This information about flagged students can be used to inform the selection of interventions and supports to keep students in school and on track for graduation.
