

**Get back in the box—
giving students a reason to stay**

What are the factors that determine drop out, and how can we keep students in school?

Superintendent, Dr. Kenneth Burnley said, "We know that Algebra is the gate-keeper to the 21st Century. When one-third of our students are failing algebra, we have to make some changes and make them now." Key Elements to Mathematics Success (KEMS) and Key Elements to Algebra Success (KEAS) are two supplemental math programs for middle school students and high school freshmen added to ramp up math mastery.

Opening in Mat-Su in October, three AdvancePath Academies:

- American Charter Academy
- Wasilla High School
- Valley Pathways

AdvancePath Academies offer multiple pathways to graduation. The academies serve students ages 15-19, tuition free, with the possibility of earning accelerated credits and graduation.

The students

Coming back to American Charter Academy, Eddie (pictured here) said, "I came back because I want to graduate. I am a senior." ACA AdvancePath was the first to open and has about 90 students.



Emily, a home-schooled student who has come to American Charter Academy AdvancePath told the

Inside, "I am a junior and want be a filmmaker. I like working at my own pace."

Another junior homeschooler at the Academy, Alyssa, said, "I would really like to graduate this year. I want to be a photographer." (Emily and Alyssa pictured below)



Above all the goals and objectives of Mat-Su schools is the box top that has a specific student's name on it—there are 16,990 boxes.



Forest (pictured here), a senior at Career & Technical High School, is at AdvancePath because he wants to get back on track.



"I had problems this semester and hope to complete geometry and other necessary courses so that I can go back and graduate with my class at CTHS." Citing the flexible schedule and the motivation of working at his pace helped Forest decide to come to AdvancePath. "A lot of kids are smart but lazy. This will help us be motivated to get it all together," said Forest.

Business strategists teach, "Think outside the box." However, school districts may be more like Dan Heath and Chip Heath who wrote the bestseller, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, who say, "Maybe you don't need to think out of the box, Maybe you just need a new one to think in."¹ The school district has gone box shopping!

What will the new box for education in Mat-Su look like? Superintendent Burnley and Assistant Superintendent Dr. Deena Paramo have said, "Our dropout rate is too high." The focus is not merely on the numbers, however; it is on the relationships, students' relationships with caring adults.

Top 5 Reasons to Stay in School

1. High school dropouts are four times as likely to be unemployed as those who have completed four or more years of college
2. Graduating from high school will determine how well you live for the next 50 years of your life. High School graduates earn \$143 more per week than high school dropouts. College graduates earn \$336 more per week than high school graduates (\$479 more per week than high school dropouts)
3. Dropouts are more likely to apply for and receive public assistance than graduates of high school
4. Dropouts comprise a disproportionate percentage of the nation's prison and death row inmates. 82% of prisoners in America are high school dropouts
5. School districts all over the country provide alternative programs for students who are not successful in the usual school setting

(Source: www.dropoutprevention.org)

Dropout factors in MSBSD:

- failing grades (a D or F)
- low scores on standardized tests
- absenteeism

Knowing that dropping out is a process and not an event, it is also a process that keeps a student in school. The contributing factors to dropping out are not isolated and may often be compounded in a student's life. Home and school problems are jumbled.

*Dropping out is a process
and not an event.*

Intervention is prevention

MSBSD is committed to ensuring each student makes significant academic progress in our schools. Mat-Su schools use Response to Intervention (RTI)—a three-tier approach for problem-solving for all students. The specifics of RTI methods varies at each school.

¹"Get Back in the Box," *Fast Company Magazine*, www.fastcompany.com.



Wasilla High School teachers: Dan Hietala, Kent Rilatos, Peter Kamilos, Jason Terryberry, and Brandy Peterson



Valley Pathways teachers: Delia Doss and Franchesca Heywood



American Charter Academy teachers: Bobbie Baker, Susan Foster, Sarah Bell, and Linda Ward (not pictured, Andrea Thompson)