

**On Track and On Time:
Baltimore Education Research Consortium
Core Analytic Projects July 2008- June 2011**

In keeping with BERC's mission to conduct and disseminate research to benefit Baltimore's children and families, BERC and the Baltimore City Public Schools have identified two overarching themes to inform the Consortium's strategic data analysis and collection over the next three years. BERC joins City Schools in demonstrating a commitment to *keeping on-level students on track to educational success* (including an on-time high school graduation) and *decreasing the dropout rate*. To further these two goals, BERC will conduct eight projects to identify school and classroom practices that equip students for success at the elementary, middle grades, and high school levels.

BERC research and analysis will address the following key research questions. What school and classroom practices equip students with the academic skills needed to stay on track and have successful transitions from first grade through middle school, high school, and post-secondary education? Why do many Baltimore students fall behind grade level, and what can teachers and principals do to help keep them on track? What school and classroom practices facilitate higher middle school and high school student achievement (with comparable incoming populations) among at-risk students who have shown early dropout indicators? What practices lead to higher levels of recovery and eventual on-time graduation?

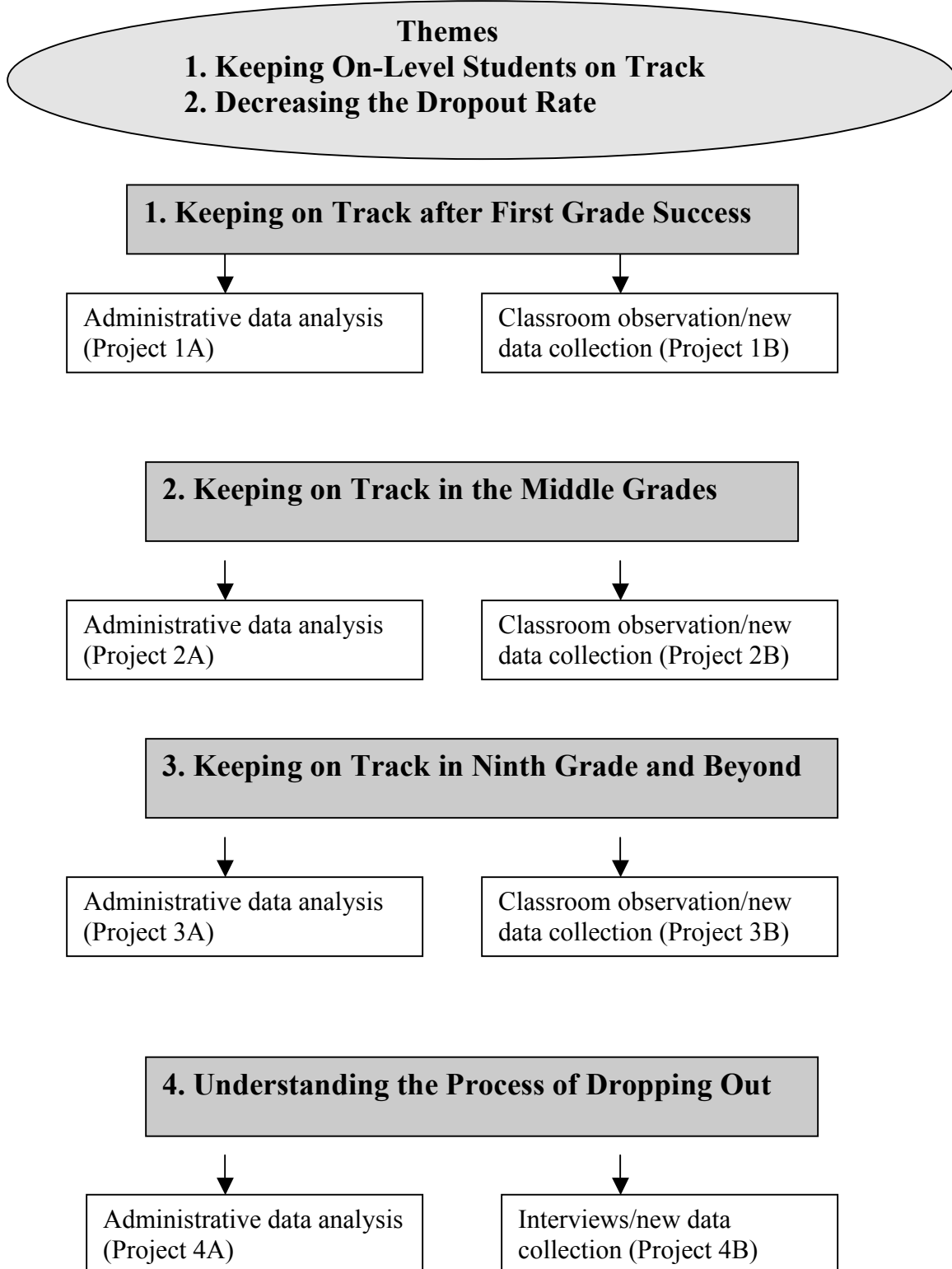
To answer these questions, BERC will access existing Baltimore City Public Schools data as well as conduct new research. Using a mixed-methods approach, BERC will pursue both quantitative analysis of longitudinal student- and school-level records (including aggregated teacher characteristics) and qualitative studies involving classroom

observations (“shadowing” students across multiple classrooms and academic years to study effective instruction), principal interviews, teacher surveys, and focus groups. Samples of students and schools will intentionally include city schools that have proven themselves beacons of hope or excellence by demonstrating educational excellence multiple years in a row or student achievement significantly above other schools serving similar student populations and neighborhoods.

In conducting this critically important research, BERC’s goal is to be a constructive part of the efforts and public conversation surrounding the education of children in Baltimore’s public schools. The results of these studies will help the district plan professional development for principals and teachers and inform district planning to design and implement effective early intervention and recovery strategies for students who fall off the path to graduation.

The two overarching research themes (keeping on-level students on track; decreasing the dropout rate) will be examined in the eight projects listed below. Research on the first three projects began in July, 2008, and first interim reports will be available as early as December 2008. Final reports for all projects are to be completed by June 2011. Beginning in 2009, a top priority is for BERC studies to incorporate contextual information on neighborhoods, families, and social services, as it is clear that students’ readiness to learn and responsiveness to educational programs must be understood within the broader context of their lives outside of school.

BERC Research Agenda



PROJECT 1A)**Keeping On Track after First Grade Success (with administrative data)**

Synopsis: Using the 1999-00 first grade cohort dataset (from an earlier BERC demonstration project) and also constructing a 2003-04 first grade cohort, we will analyze test score trajectories for students over time, determining both school (e.g., teacher characteristics and qualifications) and individual characteristics (e.g., attendance and demographic characteristics) to distinguish students who remain on grade level or above through sixth grade, and those who fall off track. In addressing the general question of, “What happens to high-achieving first-graders?” we have specific hypotheses about *(a)* selective out-migration from BCPSS, *(b)* the match or mismatch of assessment and classroom instructional focus over time, *(c)* school-based disruptions or supports for effective teaching and learning, and *(d)* home- or community-based disruptions or supports for attachment to school.

Proposed work period: July 2008 – June 2009

PROJECT 1B)**Keeping On Track after First Grade Success (classroom observation / new data collection)**

Synopsis: We are preparing to begin a three-year classroom observation study of students who were first graders in eight schools in 2007-08. During 2008-09, and the subsequent two years, we will conduct fieldwork to understand the learning opportunities and settings for a sample of focal students and their classmates. The study will examine effective classroom practices for keeping students on track, and will include surveys, interviews, or focus groups with teachers to gather information on professional development, principal leadership, social networks (Who talks to whom? Who exchanges professional advice with whom?), and organizational conditions that nurture skills of classroom management and effective instruction.

Proposed work period: August 2008 – June 2011

PROJECT 2A)**Keeping On Track in the Middle Grades (with administrative data)**

Synopsis: Using the 1999-00 sixth grade cohort dataset (from an earlier BERC demonstration project) and *also* 2007-08 data on BCPSS sixth graders, we will identify students displaying early indicators of dropout risk (poor attendance, problem behavior, course failure) to determine both school- and individual-level characteristics distinguishing these students from others with fewer risk indicators and more resilience indicators.

Proposed work period: September 2008 – June 2009

PROJECT 2B)

Keeping On Track in the Middle Grades (classroom observation / new data collection)

Synopsis: We will complete a multi-year classroom observation study of 2008-09 sixth graders in approximately eight schools. We will follow students as seventh and eighth graders to gather data on school-level and classroom instructional practices to identify effective practices for keeping students on track. The study will also include surveys, interviews, or focus groups with teachers to gather information on professional development, effective leadership, social networks (Who talks to whom? Who exchanges professional advice with whom?), and organizational conditions that nurture and develop skills of classroom management and effective instruction.

Proposed work period: Initial exploratory work, Spring 2009
Main efforts, September 2009 – June 2011

PROJECT 3A)

Keeping On Track in Ninth Grade and Beyond (with administrative data)

Synopsis: Using 2007-08 data on BCPSS ninth graders, we will identify students displaying early indicators of dropout risk (poor attendance, problem behavior, course failure), and determine school- and individual-level characteristics distinguishing these students from others with fewer risk indicators and more resilience indicators.

Proposed work period: February 2009 – December 2009

PROJECT 3B)

Keeping On Track in Ninth Grade and Beyond (classroom observation / new data collection)

Synopsis: We are planning a two-year classroom observation study of 2009-10 ninth graders in approximately eight schools, following students over two years to gather data on school-level and classroom instructional practices to identify effective practices for keeping students on track.

Proposed work period: Beginning September 2009 or September 2010

PROJECT 4A)

Understanding the Process of Dropping Out (with administrative data)

Synopsis: Using 2007-08 data on all BCPSS 9th-12th graders, we will examine the characteristics of the students who dropped out, withdrew, and transferred, as well as the characteristics of the schools they attended. The study will include a demonstration effort at linking school records to juvenile justice and health records.

Proposed work period: February 2009 – December 2009

PROJECT 4B)

Understanding the Process of Dropping Out (with interviews / new data collection)

Synopsis: We will conduct surveys and interviews with dropouts and chronically truant students. We will also survey or interview students demonstrating excellent attendance and strong engagement with school to better understand the factors underlying student success.

Proposed work period: Beginning June 2009