



# Upper Perkiomen School District

## Every Student Counts

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### The Goal

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We believe all students can learn, and it is our duty to ensure that all students do learn. We accomplish this by developing a comprehensive, integrated approach that provides system-wide support to schools, families, and the community. One such support is the district credit-recovery opportunities at the high school. The development of this program directly aligns with the goal of our comprehensive plan, which commits the district to pursuing the following goal:

*100% of students will graduate from Upper Perkiomen School District with the skills, knowledge, and understanding of how to pursue the college or career of their choice.*

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### The Need

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The student graduation rate in American high schools is not a recent concern for school and legislative personnel. In fact, for the past thirty years school reform efforts have targeted high school graduation as an area necessary for improvement. During the last three decades federal legislation including, *A Nation at Risk* (1983), *No Child Left Behind* (2002), and most recently *The Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015) have set forth guidance to increase graduation rates.

The urgency and commitment to addressing the dropout crisis is prompted by the unfortunate consequences associated with harsh realities of not earning a high school diploma. In the most recent *Building a Grad Nation* report authored by the National Center for Educational Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education, the reasons for urgency is clear:

- ✓ If the graduation rate increased to 90 percent for just one cohort of students, the country would see a \$7.2 billion increase in annual earnings and a \$1.1 billion increase in federal tax revenue.
- ✓ High school graduates are more likely to be employed, make higher taxable income, and aid in job generation.
- ✓ High school graduates earn a national average of \$8,000 more annually compared to high school dropouts.
- ✓ High school graduates are less likely to engage in criminal behavior or require social services.
- ✓ High school graduates have better health and longer life expectancy.
- ✓ High school graduates are more likely to vote. During the 2012 presidential election, 4 percent of people who left high school without graduating voted compared to 24 percent of youth with only a high school diploma and 37 percent with a college degree.
- ✓ High school graduates contribute to America's national security because students that leave high school without a diploma are not qualified to serve in the military.
- ✓ The nation's economy depends on skilled labor. Business leaders report difficulty in finding enough qualified employees with the skills, training and education to meet their companies' needs.

Both the federal and state expectations and staggering statistics prompted districts nationwide to deploy strategies to address the dropout crisis in the United States. The Upper Perkiomen School District, like other districts, responded to these expectations and made many efforts to ensure students graduate.

## Prevention Strategies

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Nationwide the graduation crisis has been addressed in a variety of ways. Over the past twenty years have included state agreement on a common cohort-based graduation calculation, a focus on improving 9th grade transition, increased academic, behavioral, and emotional supports and interventions, individualized instruction, and utilizing educational technology as a means to provide districts with the ability to prevent attrition by offering students personalized credit recovery pathways to earn a high school diploma. Below is a brief rationale for each of those efforts:

### *Standardized Graduation Calculation:*

In 2005, the National Governors Association (NGA) introduced the 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate calculation in an effort to move all states towards using a common calculation. The Adjusted Cohort formula has been deemed more accurate than other calculations in its ability to track student movement over time. In 2008, the federal government adopted NGA's formula and mandated that states calculate cohort rates beginning with 2011 graduates. The adoption of a common national standard in calculating graduation rates will ensure that student movement in and out of districts is tracked over time and that all students are accounted for more accurately and consistently than in the past.

### *Improving 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Transition:*

Researchers have identified the transition to high school as a vulnerable point in the educational trajectory where students are more likely to struggle academically and fall off-track, greatly reducing the likelihood they will graduate from high school. Several strategies to improve student performance and decrease retention rates have emerged over the last four decades. One strategy to decrease academic distress and dropout rates is implementing a Ninth Grade Academy. Freshman academies provide incoming ninth grade students with additional resources and personalized support to overcome transitional obstacles.

A Ninth Grade Academy is a self-contained learning community for ninth graders that operates like a school within a school. Generally Ninth Grade Academies have four core structural components:

- ✓ A designated separate space within the high school,
- ✓ A ninth-grade administrator who oversees the academy,
- ✓ A faculty assigned to teach only ninth-grade students, and
- ✓ Teachers organized into interdisciplinary teams that have both students and a planning period in common.

It is believed that when these components are deployed in unison, they interact to create a more personalized learning environment where ninth-grade students feel less isolated and more individually supported. This, in turn, should help students succeed in school and stay on track to high school graduation.

### *Supporting Students Diverse Needs:*

Researchers such as Lee and Burkam's (2003) challenged the common assumptions that students leave high school prior to graduation based solely on their academic and social background and found that a school's organizational attributes can have a more significant impact on a student's decision to exit school. They found the following organizational elements as being critical to the retention of youth:

- ✓ A responsive and standards aligned curriculum
- ✓ Smaller school size increased organizational trust
- ✓ The commitment and common purpose held by members of a school building
- ✓ Positive student-teacher relationships within the school

In addition to their findings related to the impact of the school organization on student retention, Lee and Burkam (2003) also found the individual factors, affiliation with and performance of deviant behaviors, poor family socialization, and

structural strain, played an equally critical role in the decision to drop out of school. School personnel play a critical role in altering the life course of students through the meaningful interactions they have with the students.

These factors represent critical considerations for schools as the student population continues to diversify and the percentage of public school students living in poverty continues to increase. In addition, the needs associated with students' social and emotional health have continued rise. School staff are continuously faced with supporting students who have severe anxiety, emotional trauma, and other mental health challenges which prevent academic success and often manifest in increased behavioral health problems and increased rates of disciplinary action.

The work school personnel are charged to do is close achievement gaps, ensure college and career readiness, and attending to various health and safety needs in order to support progress towards high school graduation.

### *Credit Recovery Opportunities*

The extensive research including the work of Allensworth & Easton, Lillard and DiCicca, and Mulroy shows that students who miss or fail academic courses are at greater risk for dropping out of school than their peers. To curb the likelihood of quitting school, the research recommends that school simultaneously provide additional supports and opportunities for credit retrieval options to promote greater school completion rates. While there is no federal definition of credit recovery, it is commonly considered the "opportunity for a student to retake a course in which he or she previously was not academically successful in earning credit towards graduation."

A study from the National Center for Education Statistics (2010) found that 88% of districts throughout the United States offered some form of credit recovery courses during that school year. The forms of credit recovery take various forms; however, the three main forms include:

- ✓ *Fully online.* In these classes, students recover lost credits through online curricula, which can be provided through software from a number of sources: the district or school itself, state-run virtual schools, charter schools, non-profit consultants or for-profit consultants. Typically, there are no face-to-face meetings or opportunities for real-time instruction.
- ✓ *Blended.* Blended-learning credit recovery programs mix face-to-face and online learning. These courses are usually self-contained and pre-programmed. Instructors, who may be either certified teachers or uncertified proctors, oversee and aid as needed. Other blended online courses also offer real-time interaction with teachers. However, since there are no established practices, the degree to which the online component is integrated varies.
- ✓ *In person.* In-person credit recovery programs most closely resemble old summer school classes. The setting is traditional and usually there are no online components. Classes take place after school or at night a few times a week during a semester, over the summer in concentrated and abbreviated sessions, or on weekends.

In February 2014, the U.S. Department of Education published the report, *Blended Credit Recovery*, which offered strategies for delivery of effective credit recovery. The report suggests that "adopting a blended learning model, credit recovery program can enhance online content delivery by personal instruction customized to meet student needs and school goals." Essential to effective deployment requires districts to analyze the method that is most appropriate for the student population.

Many districts have elected to utilize online content, which is adaptive and affords the possibilities of:

- ✓ Leveled instruction based on student proficiency
- ✓ Real-time scaffolding which pinpoints student proficiency and differentiates the learning to instruct the pre-requisite skills and scaffold learning to mastery
- ✓ Unlimited pathways that allow students to work sequentially on skills that are within their zone of proximal development (their readiness for learning level) until mastery of content

## Upper Perkiomen High School Program Description

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Similar to districts nationwide the Upper Perkiomen School District was charged with providing students with the supports necessary to earning a high school diploma.

### Improving 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Transition

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#### Pre-Transition Activities:

- Transition meetings between middle and high school staff to discuss programming options for incoming students.
- Participation of 9<sup>th</sup> grade special education teachers and transition coordinator at 8<sup>th</sup> grade IEP meetings to ease transition to 9<sup>th</sup> grade
- 8<sup>th</sup> grader visitation day
- 9<sup>th</sup> grade orientation before school starts

#### 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Supports:

- Freshman Academy
- Freshman Prep Course
  - Building Tours
  - Study Skills Lessons
  - Social Emotional Lessons
  - Early Career Planning Activities via Naviance
- Western Center Exploration Program
- College and Career Plan developed for every student

### Supporting Students Diverse Needs

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At-Risk Program Development: Established a process to monitor and supports students who are at-risk

- Building At-Risk Committee (weekly meetings to identify struggling students)
- 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Academy At-Risk Committee has their own “at risk” meetings to discuss interventions for struggling students. Weekly At-Risk student Reports sent to 9<sup>th</sup> grade teachers.
  - The Academy Honors Program – program acknowledges the positive choices of high school students
- Mental Health Supports and Services
  - Student Assistance Program (SAP)
  - Counselor run student groups
  - School-Based Outpatient Therapy
  - Individual intervention programming (anxiety, behavior, stress, loss, grief)
- Academic Supports and Services
  - Targeted academic interventions: System 44, Read 180, Executive Functioning Instruction
  - Peer Tutoring
  - Adult Mentorships
  - Academic Support Schedule (Library Intervention Lab supervised by Staff)
  - Transition Programming and Work Study

### Personalized Credit Recovery Programming for At-Risk Students

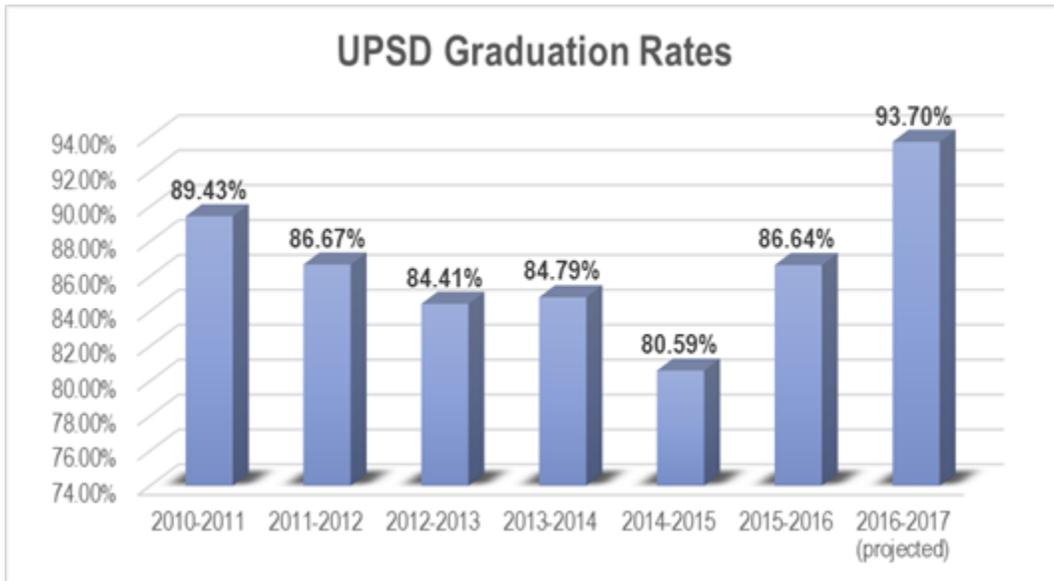
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- Utilization of Apex to assist students in recouping academic credits and stay on trajectory for high school graduation
  - APEX is a competency- based online resource utilized in a prescriptive manner to ensure that students demonstrate mastery of the standards failed in the face to face course.
  - The district currently has 39 slots accessible to district students.
  - Completion of the course is done in a blended format which provides the students with the opportunity to access the course from home, but also face to face contact daily with a staff member.

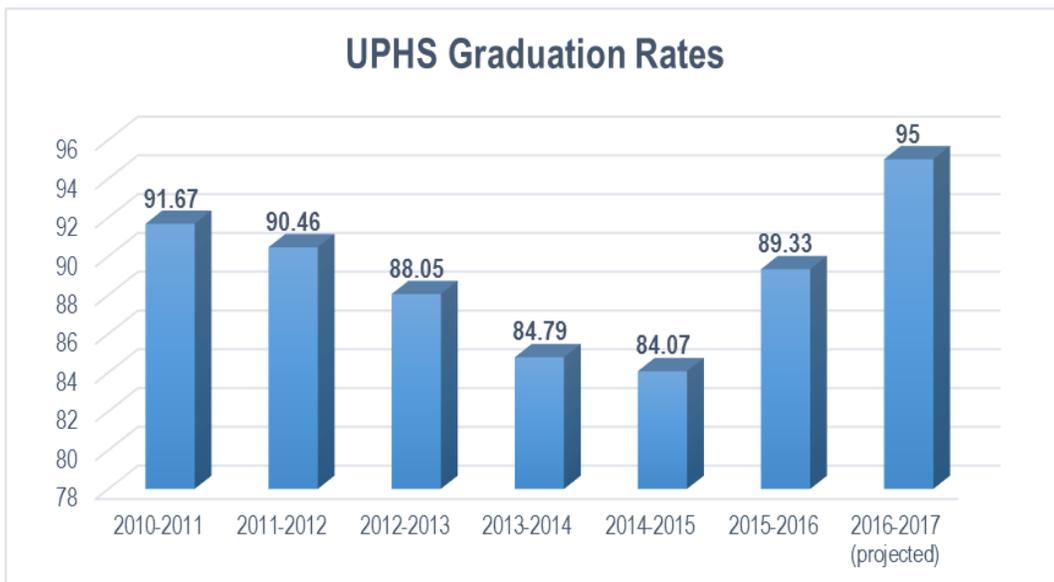
## Current Data on Graduation

Utilizing the 4-Year Adjusted cohort calculation, the graphs provided below outline the graduation rates of both the district and high school from 2010 to present.

School District Graduation Rates (Includes students in the high school and alternative placements)



Upper Perkiomen High School Graduation Rates (Includes only students at Upper Perkiomen High School)



As the district continues to strive to ensure that 100% of students graduate from high school, we must continuously respond to the diverse needs of our student community. As we analyze student data across the areas of academics, behavior, and social emotional health the district team will continue to identify areas of needs and develop and deploy strategic and systematic strategies that promote high school completion.