



## THE BANTWANA INITIATIVE OF WORLD EDUCATION, INC. DREAMS INNOVATION CHALLENGE

# THE EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

## RETAINING GIRLS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL IN ESWATINI

### CONTEXT

Across Africa, 50 million girls are not in school. In Eswatini, while girls' primary school enrolment rate is quite high (86%), enrolment rates drop down to 67% for lower secondary, and 47% in upper secondary. Despite existing policies that encourage girls to remain in school, the reality is that harmful gender norms, pregnancy, gender based violence (GBV), poverty and other factors contribute to drop out, and preclude rematriculation. Once out of school, girls are very hard to reach successfully with education, particularly once they have become mothers (teen moms). It is incumbent on educators to develop systems to identify those at risk of drop out and provide the key supports that retain them in school. The Early Warning System (EWS) is one such system.

### DESCRIPTION

Bantwana's EWS is grounded in the "ABCs" of risk behavior: Absenteeism, Behavior, and Course failure. Adapted from Creative International's evidence-based model, the EWS identifies girls vulnerable to dropout and provides a Response Protocol to retain them in school. The Response Protocol includes student assessment and counseling, development of an Academic Support Action Plan (ASAP!), and referrals to health and social services as needed. Bantwana piloted two versions of the EWS: a teacher-administered tool, and a student self-administered tool. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), Bantwana piloted the teacher-administered EWS tool with 24 Guidance and Counselling teachers across six schools. With the support of Peer Educators, Bantwana piloted the self-administered EWS tool with 517 adolescent girls, who self-assessed their risk of dropping out.

**A**  
Absenteeism

**B**  
Behavior

**C**  
Course Failure

Determined

Resilient

Empowered

AIDS-Free

Mentored

Safe



## RESULTS

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The teacher-administered EWS tool identified 36 adolescent girls as at risk of dropping out of school. The student self-administered EWS tool identified 175 adolescent girls (34%) as at risk of dropping out of school. The teachers' assessment focused on financial risk factors (girls who had outstanding fees and balances), whereas the girls' self-assessments better tapped into the three risk factors of absenteeism, behavior, and coursework: 25 adolescent girls self-reported experiencing sexual abuse, 84 reported being sexually active and 5 reported as engaging in transactional sex. Of the 175 girls who self-identified as being at risk of drop out, 65 consented to meet with Guidance and Counselling teachers, and 110 were referred to out-of-school support (for GBV, health, and social welfare support) since the EWS Response System was not fully in place.

## LESSONS LEARNED

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Results suggest that teachers may be less likely to identify girls at risk of drop out due to factors other than financial needs; deeper training is required to capacitate teachers to recognize the ABC warning signs. Girls were surprisingly candid about being at-risk, self-reporting GBV, transactional sex and being sexually active, among other indicators. The EWS self-assessment tool needs to be revised to be a less sensitive instrument, as high numbers of girls were identified as at risk, which could easily overwhelm a nascent EWS and the ability of the school community to implement effective Response Protocols. Capacity development of teachers to fully implement the Response Protocol, and link girls to services is required. The EWS is a promising approach to identify and retain girls in school. Bantwana is in discussion with the Ministry of Education and Training to explore broad uptake, and has won onward funding to pilot a digital version of the EWS self-assessment tool to be delivered directly to girls via mobile phones.

