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Centers seek to help curb dropout rate

The school system has re-enrolled 304 students and hopes to expand that number.

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Two school dropout prevention and recovery centers have moved from the drawing board to bricks and mortar in the space of nine months.

One will be housed in a leased office building in the [Denbigh](#) Professional Park, serving the northern half of the city. The other will move into the district's Jackson Academy building on Huntington Avenue to provide services for central and south [Newport News](#).

The centers are the latest phase of Newport News Public Schools' aggressive effort to keep students from dropping out and offer those who have a chance to earn a diploma or other credential.

"It's about doing what's right for each kid," said Cynthia Cooper, district director of alternative and dropout recovery services.

The two centers, which were still in the planning stages last summer, will offer classes and tests so students can earn the general education development, or GED, certificate. GEDs are considered an alternative to a high school diploma and are recognized by many employers and colleges. The centers also will provide access to online work force development services and links to post-secondary training programs and jobs.

As of this week, the district has re-enrolled 304 dropouts. The district also has helped 54 students earn GEDs as of Tuesday. The dropout centers' focus is to reach more students, including adults.

According to state data, about 20,000 adults in Newport News do not have a high school diploma or GED. And while the district has a low dropout rate — less than 1 percent — each percentage point equals about 150 students who leave schools without finishing.

The district will lease two buildings in the Denbigh office park. The smaller space, about 6,000 square feet in Building 300, will house the dropout center. The other, a 10,000 square-foot space, will be the new home for the district's Point Option/New Summits alternative programs, which currently are housed on the New Horizons Regional Education Center's Butler Farms Road campus.

The district's Jackson Academy middle school alternative program, which serves about 15 students with academic programs, counseling and behavior modification programs, will move to the Enterprise Academy alternative school on Diligence Drive in the fall. The district has budgeted about \$490,000 in its proposed \$318 million budget to pay for the dropout recovery centers and dropout prevention efforts.

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