

Dropout Recovery Initiative

THE CHALLENGE: In the United States, in Virginia, and in Newport News, there is a growing concern about the number of students who drop out of school without finishing their studies. National research indicates that more than one million American high school students drop out each year. Virginia averages over 10,000 reported dropouts annually.

While our numbers are not as dramatic, reports show that over the past decade, nearly 2,000 students have left Newport News Public Schools without a diploma or a GED credential. Although the official numbers are less than 2 percent of our secondary students, we suspect that many more children leave us for other programs, but never actually re-enroll or finish school. They join the ranks of adults in our city who struggle daily to get by without a high school credential — over 20,000 of them.

Statistics show that dropouts earn an average of \$9,200 less per year than high school graduates and are half as likely to be in the labor force at all. Dropouts are twice as likely to fall into poverty and are more likely to raise children who drop out of school. Most alarming, dropouts are more than eight times as likely as high school graduates to end up in jail or prison.

The graduation rate in Newport News Public Schools is 88 percent for 2006, 9 percent above the state average.

THE SOLUTION: National studies indicate that there are many reasons why students drop out of high school, so community response to the problem must be varied as well. Newport News Public Schools is building a comprehensive approach to our dropout problem, working to reduce the risk factors for students, increasing the value of the educational experience for students, and building programs to bring adults back in to finish school and pave the way to a better future — for them and for our community.

OUR BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS INCLUDES:

- Analysis of our own dropout data to find out why students left us and how to better meet their needs.
- Identification of students at risk for dropping out and the initiation of programs to help them recover credits toward graduation or obtain a GED credential.
- Initiation of the Career Pathways initiative to engage students in studies geared toward their interests and future.
- Community outreach to build collaborative partnerships to help remove the issues that are barriers to student success (e.g., family crises, financial problems, transportation issues).
- Creation of dropout recovery centers throughout Newport News to help adults finish high school and move on to better careers or college or both.