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DROPOUT DILEMMA

BY KATI KNOWLAND

Nonprofits, schools, businesses, parents, teachers, students — everyone is concerned about the number of students dropping out of high school in North Carolina. According to the Department of Public Instruction, more than 30 percent of students who entered high school in 2004 had not graduated by 2008. The DPI also found that a total of 23,550 students — or 5.24 percent of the students in grades nine through 12 — dropped out of school in the 2006-07 school year, marking an increase from 5.04 percent in the 2005-2006 school year.

When North Carolina's economy was dependent on low-paying, low-skill jobs, it didn't much matter how many students weren't completing high school; even dropouts could find gainful employment and support themselves. But in today's economy, fueled by new manufacturing and high-tech enterprises, high school dropouts are a major concern.

"In the last 20 years, North Carolina has been stung by unprecedented economic change that is reshaping jobs and markets in the United States and around the world," said Tony Habit, president of the North Carolina New Schools Project. "In the state's past, students could quit school and still earn a living," he added. "That past is no more."

Those jobs have been replaced with an economy that is reliant on a well-educated workforce.

"Our success as a state and nation depends on educating all students; today's students are tomorrow's citizens, leaders, entrepreneurs and workforce," said Tricia Willoughby, executive director of the North Carolina Business Committee for Education. "The jobs that our leaders are attracting to North Carolina are knowledge-based and require critical thinking, problem solving, innovation and technological literacy."

In order to ensure that they continue to have a well-educated workforce ready to meet their needs, businesses are standing up and taking notice of the climbing dropout rate.

"More than anyone, business leaders understand that our education system must keep pace with the rising demands of the global knowledge economy," said Susan Milliken, executive director of Futures for Kids.

One such company is SAS, based in Cary.

"To maintain North Carolina's reputation as a destination for technology and knowledge-driven

Why the increasing high-school dropout rate is a problem and what is being done to fix it

companies, it's essential that a qualified workforce be in place," said June Rivers, manager of SAS Education Value-Added Assessment System. "SAS is one of the companies that need that talent, as are our customers, so we focus our social responsibility efforts toward creating more engaging and rewarding learning environments for our state's children."

In addition to hurting a student's earning potential and hurting the business community, high

school dropouts cost all North Carolinians more than they might realize. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, this year's high school dropouts in North Carolina will cost the state's economy \$11 billion in wages, taxes and productivity over the students' lifetimes.

according to Communities in Schools of North Carolina, at the low end of the scale, a dropout costs society \$5,483 more per year than does someone with a high school degree. CISNC pointed out that the US Census Bureau counts 1,350,000 dropouts in North Carolina, costing the state \$7.4 billion in 2008. The organization notes that this is more than one-third of the current state budget.

"The state's high dropout rate has profound implications for the future health of North Carolina's economy," said John Dornan, president and executive director of the Public School Forum of North Carolina. "If North Carolina is going to attract high-wage, high-skill jobs, it needs to build a workforce that has the capacity to meet the demands of a global marketplace. From a humanistic point of view, the state can't stand by and see nearly one-third of its young people run the risk of being mired in poverty because the educational system failed them."

On the following pages, you'll find profiles of six of the many organizations working to keep kids in school. Their leaders discuss how they tackle the problem of dropouts and how they've been successful in their missions.

Also in this special dropout prevention section, *NC Magazine* highlights the work of the General Assembly's Joint Legislative Committee on Dropout Prevention and the grants it is providing to organizations working to curb the number of dropouts in NC. Also, *NC Magazine* profiles an innovative new program working to put a laptop in the hands of every student.

ON THE DROPOUT FRONT LINES

Profiles (in their own words) of six organizations working to keep kids in school

→ A dropout is **eight times** more likely to be in **jail or prison** than a person with at least a high school diploma.

→ A dropout will earn **\$12,000 less per year** than a high school graduate.

→ Female dropouts are **three times** more likely to become **unwed mothers.**

Source CISNC



COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS OF NC

www.cisnc.org

Leadership: Mike Stephens, COO, and Linda Harrill, president



MIKE STEPHENS

Date founded: 1989

Mission: We assist North Carolina communities in replicating the Communities in Schools process of coordinated service delivery, support the 39 local CIS organizations across the state, and advocate for children, youths and their families.

CISNC provides regional and on-site training and technical assistance, builds partnerships with state agencies and organizations to benefit young people, and serves as a resource and information center for local communities concerned about youth at risk of school failure.

Communities in Schools is the nation's largest stay-in-school network, providing direct services to nearly 1.2 million youths in 195 communities across the United States. CIS is providing the link between teachers and the community by bringing caring adults into the schools and community sites to meet children's needs. This link gives children the much needed opportunity to focus on learning and their future. Our network's mission is to champion the connection of needed community resources with schools and other sites to help young people successfully learn, stay in school and prepare for life.

How they're helping: Communities in Schools was founded on the concept that all students can and will achieve academically when resources to address their academic and social service needs are tailored, coordinated and accessible.

That premise has evolved into what we now call community-based, integrated student services. Through the efforts of a single point of contact (site coordinator) at a school, individual student needs are assessed, and research-based connections are made between the student and targeted community resources. Most of these resources fit into what we call the Five Basics.

A story of success: We are currently undergoing a research evaluation by a disinterested third-party organization on a grant paid for by another third-party organization. In the spring of this year, Caliber announced the findings of the first three years of this study. Those findings were:

The Five Basics:
A personal relationship with a caring adult.

A safe place to learn and grow.

A healthy start to a healthy lifestyle.

A marketable skill to use upon graduation.

A chance to give back.

Among dropout prevention programs using scientifically based evidence, the CIS Model is one of a very few in the United States proven to keep kids in school and is the only dropout prevention program in the nation with scientifically based evidence to prove that it increases graduation rates, graduating students on time with a standard high school diploma.

When implemented with high fidelity, the CIS Model results in a higher percentage of students reaching proficiency in fourth- and eighth-grade reading and math.

Effective implementation of the CIS Model correlates more strongly with positive school-level outcomes (i.e., graduation rates, achievement, etc.) than non-orchestrated service provision alone, resulting in notable improvements of school-level outcomes in the framework of the CIS model.

Clearly the entire CIS network is pleased that what we have been saying for years has finally been validated by a disinterested, well-respected, third-party research group.



FUTURES FOR KIDS

www.f4k.org

Leadership: Susan Milliken, executive director



SUSAN MILLIKEN

Date founded: 2001

Mission: The idea behind F4K is bringing together our business resources in one place to support students and equip them with the skills necessary to succeed in the workplace while at the same time, helping businesses "grow their own." F4K addresses the need to be proactive about workforce preparedness in NC.

F4K's mission is to bridge the gap between the hopes and dreams of our students and the workforce development needs of our communities. We use technology to connect middle and high school students to real people and companies in their neighborhoods and across the state. Technology can level the playing field for students, who may not otherwise have the opportunity to talk with an engineer at Cisco or to learn how their artistic skills might be used in a career. Students with a plan are more successful in school, and our goal at F4K is to show every one of our students that there is a future for them that makes the most of their unique talents and interests.

How they're helping: F4K gives students relevance by reinforcing the value of education. Research confirms what we already know, that students who understand why they're in school are less likely to drop out. F4K helps students discover what makes them tick and shows them how to translate that into a career plan. According to an evaluation by the Duke Center for Child and

Family Policy, "91 percent of students using F4K understand they need to do well in school in order to get the kinds of jobs they want." Through F4K, students can also connect to businesses and people who can encourage them, including students who have limited access to these resources due to location or socioeconomic background. It's not just for students, though. F4K gives schools and families access to real people, from biotechnologists to bike mechanics and more. Access to these "Career Coaches" is what makes F4K unique and provides students with a context for achievement and success.

A story of success: Carlos and Wendy now work at BlueCross BlueShield of North Carolina thanks to a partnership with F4K. Traci Claiborne, the career development coordinator at Sanderson High School in Raleigh, has been using F4K to help her students create career goals. This spring, F4K shared with Ms. Claiborne BlueCross BlueShield's growing need for bilingual customer service representatives. She then invited bilingual students to hear BCBSNC talk about career opportunities based on their career interests in the F4K database. The company offers many wonderful benefits to employees including college tuition reimbursement and on-site college courses and instructors. Carlos was there and Wendy heard about it from a friend. BCBSNC reports that both of these bright new hires are doing great in training. The most excited person though may be Carlos's father, who has been sharing Carlos's opportunity with plenty of other parents. It's a win-win for everyone, most of all Carlos and Wendy.

F4K's mission is to bridge the gap between the hopes and dreams of our students and the workforce development needs of our communities.

NORTH CAROLINA BUSINESS COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

www.ncbce.org



TRICIA WILLOUGHBY

Leadership: Tricia Willoughby, executive director

Date founded: 1983

Founded by: Governor Jim Hunt

Mission: The mission of NCBCE is to provide advocacy for public schools as well as to provide input, feedback and communication for members and other education and policy leaders. NCBCE is a nonprofit, nonpartisan consortium of businesses from across the state with a 25-year history of support, input and advocacy for public schools.

How they're helping: NCBCE impacts the graduation rate in a number of ways. For example: Members stress the im-

portance of graduation using communication tools provided by NCBCE. A flash drive with videos, a PowerPoint presentation and talking points was given to all members to assist them in speaking to civic clubs, education groups and other organizations. The goal of that message is that staying in school pays off — both financially and in choices students have beyond high school. An NCBCE publication, "Snapshots of Strategic Corporate Investment," provides examples of ways businesses in our state can support students in our schools.

Relationships with business leaders in work environments will help students understand the importance of graduation from high school.

To promote retention of quality,

teachers, NCBCE supports the Teacher Working Conditions Survey. In 2008, over 104,000 educators participated in the survey. Data from previous surveys has driven legislative policy changes such as requiring planning time for teachers during the school day.

NCBCE's survey of members provided information to the State Board of Education about the knowledge and skills that NC employers look for in potential employees. These survey results were instrumental in the board's revision of its mission, goals, curriculum and testing program.

The Graduation Project is an assessment that requires students to demonstrate what they can do with what they know. NCBCE's Job Shadowing Program provides a template to connect students to community leaders that will enhance these projects. Relationships with business leaders in work environments will help students understand the importance of graduation from high school.

A story of success: Here are some examples of ways NCBCE helps improve the graduation rate:

Brought together more than 120 business, education and policy leaders at NCBCE annual meeting held at the RBC Center and hosted by member company RBC Bank. This meeting gave Governor Easley an opportunity to talk about North Carolina's education agenda that will help keep students in school including: More at Four for at-risk preschoolers; class size reduction to ensure student achievement in early grades; middle-school literacy coaches that impact those years when students make the transition from learning to read to reading to learn; Learn and Earn High Schools that give high school students opportunities to study on a college or community college campus earning a high school diploma and an associate degree.

Every two years, NCBCE hosts breakfast meetings with local Chambers of Commerce in the seven economic regions across the state. These meetings with business and education leaders are times to inform and gather feedback related to needs of 21st century students, schools, teachers — and to communicate the tools in place to keep students in school.

→ NORTH CAROLINA NEW SCHOOLS PROJECT

www.newschoolsproject.org



TONY HABIT & BURLEY MITCHELL

Leadership: Tony Habit, president

Date founded: August 2003

Founded by: Office of the Governor and the Education Cabinet with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the General Assembly

Mission: North Carolina needs to graduate significantly more students from high school who are substantially more prepared to meet the demands of

higher education, work and citizenship. Devised in the last century, the traditionally structured and run high school has proven incapable of meeting this challenge in many communities throughout North Carolina. The purpose of the NCNSP is to accelerate systemic, sustainable innovation in secondary schools across the state so that, in time, every high school in North Carolina graduates every student ready for college, careers and life in the society and economy of the 21st century.

How they're helping: Research nationally on the reasons why students drop out has found that disconnection and disengagement are bigger factors contributing to the dropout crisis than academic failure or lack of ability. Most dropouts could succeed in school and believe as much. The NCNSP partners with local communities and educators to create innovative, highly personalized high schools that push all students to be college- and work-ready and prevent any students from losing interest or focus. More than 100 innovative high schools are open this school year.

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NCNSP's clear intent is to spark and support deep instructional change. The conditions that permit this change are created in part by purposefully and dramatically rethinking traditional high schools' organization to allow different teaching and learning. This contrasts with layering a new "program" over existing instructional practice and school organization.

A story of success: While the state's dropout rate climbed to 5.24 percent for 2006-07 (the most recent year for which data is available), the 57 innovative high schools open then recorded a dropout rate of 2.8 percent — about half the statewide rate. If North Carolina's rate had matched that of innovative high schools, the state would have seen 11,000 fewer dropouts. Sixty percent of innovative high schools had no more than one dropout.

The success of innovative high schools wasn't a one-year occurrence. More than three quarters of the innovative high schools that enrolled ninth-graders in 2005-06 have seen no more than two dropouts during those students' ninth- and 10th-grade years.

"The teachers show that they care," said Jamal Robinson, a junior at Newton-Conover Health Science High School. "They're always on me about doing my work. They won't let me fail. ... At a regular high school, I wouldn't be getting the extra help that I'm getting here."

"I like that the teachers are more willing to help you," said Angelina Mason, 16, a junior at Howard Health and Life Sciences High School in Cumberland County. Angelina said she was on the verge of dropping out, but the principal got wind of her plans, went to her house and changed her mind. "Her words really meant something," Angelina said.



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**PUBLIC SCHOOL
 FORUM OF NC**
www.ncforum.org

Leadership: John Dornan,
 president/executive director

Date founded: 1985

Mission: Its original mission was to create a consensus around educational initiatives that could improve schools across North Carolina and to contribute to creating a system of education that is second to none.

How they're helping: The Forum, on behalf of the General Assembly, is administering the Collaborative Project, a five-county project aimed at improving educational performance and lowering dropout rates in small, low-wealth school systems. The premise of the initiative is that dropout prevention must begin early, and that if students have a strong education foundation in their elementary years they will be much more likely to be successful in school. The initiative focuses heavily on building the capacity of teachers and administrators through intensive staff development.

Dropout prevention must begin early, and ... if students have a strong education foundation in their elementary years they will be much more likely to be successful in school.

A story of success: The largest contribution the Forum has made has been through the Teaching Fellows Program, which the Forum proposed in 1986 and has administered on behalf of the state ever since. One graduate of the

Teaching Fellows Program, Ron Clark, became one of the nation's most successful teachers, ultimately winning the national Walt Disney Teacher of the Year award. Ron makes a profound difference in the lives of disadvantaged young people, first in rural Eastern North Carolina and then in Harlem, in New York City. He has gone on to write two books on education. A movie was made that was based on his experiences with disadvantaged students, and he has gone on to open a school that is drawing national attention in inner-city Atlanta.

**SAS EDUCATIONAL ←
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 ASSESSMENT SYSTEM**
www.sas.com/govedu/edu/services/effectiveness.html

Leadership: June Rivers, manager

Founded by: The North Carolina General Assembly funded statewide access to SAS EVAAS reporting for the first time in 2007 to put the results of rigorous longitudinal analyses of individual students' test scores at educators' fingertips.

Mission: SAS is one of the largest software companies in the world. With consistent revenue growth and profitability since 1976, SAS has the depth of resources to sustain excellence in product development and customer support. In July 2000, SAS acquired the EVAAS team to provide analysis of test scores to states and school districts and to deliver the results via a user-friendly, secure access drill down interface on the Internet.

How they're helping: To support the NC DPI contract, the SAS EVAAS group has delivered hundreds of virtual professional development sessions on the EVAAS web reporting as an in-kind contribution to North Carolina school districts. The focus of many of the virtual professional development sessions is the early identification of students likely to fail high school graduation tests. The early identification becomes the catalyst that encourages educators to develop specific academic interventions with at-risk students two to three years before the students are likely to take the test and experience failure. This early intervention is a proactive use of the results of rigorous analyses of test scores.

A story of success: Interviews with students who have dropped out of school in the past suggest that while many students drop out because they are behind academically, others drop out because they are bored, because they have become disengaged with school and with learning. Sometimes students fail to take advantage of rigorous courses available to them and sometimes districts have limited resources to provide them. Once again, early identification of students likely to be unsuccessful becomes an issue.

In 2007, the NC Department of Public Instruction made SAT scores available to SAS. The EVAAS group has worked in collaboration with Dr. Arnold Bell of the Development & Experiential Learning Division of Undergraduate Academic Programs at NC State University to extend the NC DPI EVAAS reporting to also identify students with a high likelihood of reaching the higher SAT college entrance scores necessary to be competitive in technical college majors. Earning these scores is far more likely when students enroll in more rigorous high school courses. The EVAAS individual student projections to SAT scores associated with specific NCSU majors provide an additional metric for counselors to use in conversations with students and parents about course selection. Access to virtual professional development sessions is posted regularly at ncdpi.sas.com. Drop-in and customized private sessions are available at no cost to participants. ♦

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