

# WhatWorksSC

## *expert series*

*An expert series building on the findings of the largest ever study of public education in South Carolina*

### *Instituting Successful Dropout Prevention Strategies*

South Carolina has the unfortunate distinction of leading the country with the largest percentage of high school “dropout factories” in America, a staggering 49 percent (Tucci, 2009). A “dropout factory” refers to a school where 60 percent or fewer of entering freshmen progress to their senior year three years later. Until we reduce the number of these dropout factories and tackle the drop-out crisis head on, South Carolina will be perpetually behind in educating its students, creating well-paying jobs, developing its economy, and succeeding as a state in today’s global marketplace.

This paper will further explore this critical issue. First, the results of the recent Riley Institute study on public education, relating to the issue of reducing the dropout rate in South Carolina, will be provided and discussed. Next, Dr. Terry Peterson, Senior Fellow at the College of Charleston and 2010 winner of the William White Education National Achievement Award from the C.S. Mott Foundation, will further introduce the issue and provide insight into why stakeholders from all over South Carolina have overwhelmingly identified a focus on reducing the dropout rate as vital for the state. Following, a sample of effective statewide initiatives currently in place will be highlighted, using data collected for each initiative to show promise and effectiveness. Finally, Dr. Jay Smink, Executive Director of the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University and author of numerous books on dropout prevention, will evaluate how the state is doing as a whole and provide national models that could be relevant for South Carolina.





## *I. The Riley Institute Study: Key Local Leaders Believe that Reducing the Dropout Rate is a High Priority*

How do we know that South Carolina's stakeholders believe that reducing the dropout rate should be a priority? Results from the large-scale study conducted by the Riley Institute at Furman clearly show that various stakeholders from all over the state overwhelmingly support a focus on this issue. During the course of the study, the Riley Institute project team spent more than 3,000 hours meeting with nearly 800 South Carolinians to gather their opinions on public education. The team met with businessmen and women, teachers of all levels, superintendents, parents, school board members, principals and students from every county and school district in the state - large and small, rural and urban, wealthy and poor.

Throughout the research, stakeholder groups across South Carolina voiced common support for the need to focus on reducing the dropout rate and discussed a number of strategies aimed to do just that. Specific strategies that emerged at high levels of consensus across the stakeholder groups included: improving learning in the early years and offering high quality early childhood education programs, offering more tutoring opportunities for struggling students, ensuring that there are effective teachers in every classroom, and instituting specific drop out prevention programs beginning in middle school.

Organizations such as The National Governors' Association, The National Dropout Prevention Center, Communities in Schools, America's Promise Alliance, The Education Trust, and The Alliance for Excellent Education have been diligent in providing stakeholders with pertinent information to better understand strategies for effective dropout prevention. Specifically, the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University has identified 15 effective strategies that have the greatest impact on the dropout rate. These strategies, which have been tested and are supported by comprehensive research, are divided by the Center into the following groups: School and Community Perspective, Early Interventions, Basic Core Strategies, and Making the Most of Instruction. Please see the following web site for more information of all of these strategies: [www.nationaldropoutprevention.org](http://www.nationaldropoutprevention.org). The efforts of the Center also will be discussed more in subsequent sections of this paper.

It is clear from looking at the results of this large body of research on reducing the dropout rate that addressing the issue must begin early, continue unabated through the high school years, and address issues from teaching and instruction to building strong community to school partnerships.

## *II. South Carolina's High School Dropout Rate: Two Achilles Heels Greatly Limiting the Growth of Well-Paying Jobs and Our Economic Vitality*

*By Terry Peterson, Ph.D.*

The low high school graduation rate in South Carolina is a continuing problem that limits many of our futures. The impact of a high dropout rate is greatly and further compounded by the fact that high school dropouts normally do not continue to technical training or a two or four-year college. Thus, compared to other states and other developed countries, we have a low percentage of high school graduates and young adults getting a technical or college education. In other words, South Carolina has dual Achilles heels in these rapidly changing

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times and information age, greatly limiting many of our young people and our state's income and potential. Many young people and their families are at a severe competitive disadvantage for employment, income, health, and retirement.

For at least 40 years, if not 50 years, there has been a growing gap in income and employability between those who dropout of high school and those who acquire a two or four-year college degree. It is hard to believe, but in 1950, someone in their early thirties who dropped out of high school and someone who finished a four-year college at that stage of their career almost earned the same income. Now, individuals with these two different education levels have an almost \$1 million dollar gap in lifetime earnings. Those who do not finish high school and those who are not career or college ready will have increasing difficulty in finding employment—and particularly finding employment that pays a livable income. Some suggest this increased demand for skills and degrees is not going to continue. Unfortunately, it is, and this makes it a very pressing issue in almost every part of South Carolina and across much of America. The economic recession we have endured since 2007 tends to hide the need for more young people (and older Americans) to acquire at least a high school diploma and some further training to get ahead.

The United States Department of Labor periodically projects the demand and decline of jobs into the future. One very recent analysis of these data (The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2010) found that America is slowly coming out of the Recession of 2007—only to find itself on a collision course with the future: not enough Americans are completing high school or entering two and four-year year colleges. By 2018, we will need 22 million new college degrees—but will fall short of that number by at least three million postsecondary degrees, Associate's or better. In addition, we will need at least 4.7 million new workers with postsecondary certificates. At a time when every job is precious, this shortfall will mean lost economic opportunity for millions of American workers. It is worth looking at the education requirements for jobs projected to grow the fastest and decline the most over the next few years. This is the job market our eighth and ninth graders will face immediately when they reach 18 years of age.

**Projected Education Requirements for the  
Changing Job Market in America:  
For 30 Jobs in Each Column  
2004-2014**

<u>Requirements</u>	<u>Fastest Growing</u>		
	<u>Occupations</u>	<u>Largest job growth</u>	<u>Largest job decline</u>
Masters/Doctors	5	1	0
Bachelors	10	5	0
Associate	9	2	0
Long-term on Job	0	1	2
Moderate on Job	3	6	11
Short-term on Job	3	15	17

Source: *Special Analysis conducted of the U.S. Department of Labor Job Protection data, 2004-2014 for a Workshop on Dropout Prevention/Dropout Recovery for the Southeastern Council of Foundations November 15, 2007, by Terry K. Peterson*

*"For at least 40 years, if not 50 years, there has been a growing gap in income and employability between those who dropout of high school and those who acquire a two or four-year college degree."*

*"By not completing high school, we have too many people falling off the first rung of the ladder to productive citizenship in this 21st Century."*



Almost all the new jobs will require a high school diploma plus more training or education. None of the 30 fastest shrinking occupations necessitates an Associate degree, or a Bachelors degree or a Masters. Twenty-four of the 30 fastest growing occupations require at least an Associate degree. The trend that started 50 years ago is continuing. Because of the low high school graduation rates in much of South Carolina, many of our young people and families will be left behind in the new international marketplace of jobs and ideas. By not completing high school, we have too many people falling off the first rung of the ladder to productive citizenship in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Tragically, this is even before they have a chance to get a foothold in some post-secondary training or degree program—the ticket to economic independence in this new century.

Since our retirement system is based on younger people paying into the system for many of the years covered by Social Security, these low graduation and low post-secondary going rates will affect almost everyone -- not just those with low education levels. Because the aftermath of the 2007 recession is clouding these trends, it is often difficult to see the need for more education as the ticket, in most circumstances, to getting a job and earning a reasonable wage. New analyses of very current job trends and requirements, however, can help see this right now and right in South Carolina.

Between 2008 and 2018, South Carolina will create 630,000 job vacancies both from new jobs and from job openings due to retirement. 349,000 of these job vacancies will be for those with postsecondary credentials, 206,000 for high school graduates and 75,000 for high school dropouts (The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2010). For today's elementary and secondary students to be employable in South Carolina, almost 9 out of 10 will need to graduate from high school and the majority of today's students will need some 2-4 year college degree or a post-secondary certificate.

While there is always disagreement about how to count and compute graduation rates, and which source to use, the table below shows one source's calculation of South Carolina's rate compared against the highest three southern states, the highest three states, and the national average. This might not be the best measure used—but it is somewhat close to an apples-to-apples comparison and is helpful to look at when analyzing this issue.

### High School Graduation Rates

South Carolina- 60.1%  
National Average: 74.7%

#### Highest Three States:

1. Nebraska- 87.8%
2. Wisconsin- 86.7%
3. Iowa- 86.6%

#### Highest Three Southern States:

1. Virginia- 79.6%
2. Maryland- 79.3%
3. West Virginia- 77.3%

Source: J. Laird, E.F. Catalkdi, A.K. Ramani, and C. Chapman, "Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate of Public High School Students by State: School Year: 2004-2005," *NCES 2008-053, Table 12 (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 2008)*.



No matter how you cut it, our students in South Carolina are graduating from high school significantly below the national average, and below the highest three southern states and the highest three states. And, our national graduation rate is no longer considered a high water mark for the world. In fact, we are sinking in our international ranking on this measure as well as on our standing on our college-going rate.

The benchmark we should be aiming for is an 80-90% graduation rate by 2018 to match the job demands projected for our young people and to be competitive with the graduation rate of the three highest states in America. To increase the graduation rate by just one percent would mean 500 more students would have to graduate from high school than their peers did in 2004-2005. For the 80% benchmark to be met, 10,000 more students would need to graduate. And to reach the 90 percent mark, 15,000 more students would need to graduate.

Turning around this unacceptably low high school graduation rate doesn't start with reforming high schools alone. We must work from preschool and continue working through elementary and middle schools too. There are definite strategies, actions and initiatives that make a positive difference in helping many more of our young people to get on a pathway to high school graduation and additional technical training and/or a college education. We are not hopeless or helpless.

One example of an organization implementing many positive actions and strategies is the KnowledgeWorks Foundation in Ohio, which has found great success in stemming the tide of dropouts through their three high school turnaround models: early college high schools, STEM schools, and New Tech high schools. Please see appendix A for a description of these exciting initiatives. These examples from KnowledgeWorks, along with many other strategies that will be discussed in subsequent sections of this paper, reveal that the dropout rate can be stemmed when focused strategies are put in place. These strategies involve commitment from the community and stakeholder buy-in, along with strong leadership.

We have the ability to increase the graduation rate in South Carolina if we put our minds to it, but we must invest the needed resources and build the needed partnerships among families, schools, employers, colleges and community groups to make the dramatic changes that will make a difference for many of our young people. These strategies, actions and initiatives can be incentivized by changes in state and local policies and funding. We must advocate for them. And these changes are needed in South Carolina now.

### ***III. Strategies in South Carolina: What Is South Carolina Doing to Address the Dropout Rate?***

A growing number of studies from across America provide evidence about what needs to be done to reduce the dropout rate. The question then becomes whether or not South Carolina is taking the steps necessary to address this pressing statewide issue. In order to begin answering this question, a number of statewide initiatives designed specifically to reduce the dropout rate in South Carolina will be analyzed.

The initiatives highlighted below have been identified based on information gathered from meetings throughout the state with education leaders and groups; phone calls, electronic mail and other correspondence with a variety of education and community leaders throughout the state; and from a survey sent to superintendents, principals, and education leaders statewide.

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A larger list of these initiatives can be found in the WhatWorksSC clearinghouse, which can be found on the Center for Education Policy and Leadership's web site: <http://riley.furman.edu/education/projects/whatworkssc>.

## **Initiative #1: COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS**

**Summary:** Communities in Schools (CIS) was developed in 1977 so that underserved youth could get the assistance they needed to stay in school. CIS believes that each child needs five things: a one-on-one relationship with a caring adult, a safe place to learn and grow, a healthy start to a healthy future, a marketable skill to use upon graduation, and a chance to give back to peers and community. CIS is a national program (the largest dropout prevention network in America), and it operates in 15 different school systems in South Carolina. CIS addresses the social, emotional, physical, and academic needs of the students it serves. The program actively connects students and parents to educators, local health and service organizations, governmental agencies, and businesses that can provide essential academic and non-academic services required to provide deep opportunities for lifelong success of students. CIS accomplishes this by providing on-site, integrated, student services within the school day such as mentoring, physical and mental health services, career and college guidance, and service-learning to students identified as at risk of dropping out of high school. A national evaluation of the Communities in Schools programs was conducted at the school-level for 1,700 participating schools. ICF International surveyed each school to determine the level of implementation of the program components. The high implementation schools partnering with CIS were matched with an equal number of comparison schools without the CIS program. The initial findings indicate a higher percentage of students reaching proficiency in reading and math in the CIS schools. School level outcomes, such as academic achievement and attendance, were also higher than in those schools without coordinated services. Finally, the evaluation indicated that CIS is one of only a few scientifically-based programs to show improvements in reducing dropout rates and the only program to improve students' on-time graduation rates.

### **Demographics**

- Target Settings: Rural, Urban, Inner City
- Target Groups Served: At-risk
- SES Codes of Schools/Districts Served: Dillon County, Lancaster County, Barnwell County, Charleston County, Cherokee County, Chester County, Clarendon County, Dorchester County, Greenville County, Kershaw County, Lancaster School District 2, Lee County, Saluda County, Communities in Schools of SC Inc, Communities in Schools of the Midlands

### **Resources**

- Annual Cost: The cost per student is \$180
- Funding Sources: Local corporations, United Way, grants
- Staffing Needs: Site Coordinators
- Infrastructure/Equipment Needs: Funding for Overhead, Laptops



**Evaluation:** Nationwide, 78% of CIS students had improved attendance, 89% had fewer incidents of discipline, 80% had improved academic performance, 82% were promoted to the next grade, and 78% of eligible seniors graduated. Only 3% dropped out, which is lower than the national average of 4%. It is also lower than the estimated 6% dropout rate for student populations similar to those served by CIS.

**Contact Information:** Susi Smith, 864.250.6737, [ssmith@cisgreenville.org](mailto:ssmith@cisgreenville.org)

## **Initiative #2: HORRY COUNTY EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL**

**Summary:** The Horry County Early College High School is a public-private program where students attend high school on a college campus and may earn up to two years of college credit by the time they graduate. The Horry County Early College High School was established in 2006 in Horry County, South Carolina. It is a free program that provides transportation, tuition, technology, and books. Horry County Early College provides smaller classes, academic coaches, mentors, and opportunities for service learning projects and internships with local businesses. Criteria for eligibility include: the potential to succeed in college with academic support, average standardized test scores, a 2.0-3.5 GPA, the desire and determination to attend college, the first person in one's family to attend college, and/or financial need. Horry County Early College's mission statement is "to provide a small, personalized learning community that accelerates our diverse student population to become responsible citizens who are strong critical thinkers, collaborators, and communicators who can successfully meet and face the challenges of competing in an ever-changing global society." Horry County Early College believes that college readiness is attainable by drawing on a college environment to build students' identity as future college students.

### **Demographics**

- Target Settings: Urban, rural
- Target Groups Served: Groups traditionally underrepresented in post-secondary education

### **Resources**

- Funding Sources: State allocations in addition to private fundraising
- Partner Organizations: Horry County Schools, Horry-Georgetown Technical College, and Business/Education Expectations Partnership

**Evaluation:** In the first year of operation, 134 of 138 freshmen completed the year at ECHS, 49 of 134 (37%) earned the benchmark score on COMPASS reading test, and 94% earned six high school credits. On end of course testing, 96% passed Algebra I test, 86% passed English I test, and 57% passed Physical Science test.

**Contact Information:** Joan Grimmett, Principal; 843.349.7102; [jgrimmett@horrycountyschools.net](mailto:jgrimmett@horrycountyschools.net)



### **Initiative #3: STAR ACADEMY**

**Summary:** There are presently 22 Star Academies in South Carolina, 18 of which are located along the I-95 corridor. Star Academy programs, schools within schools that are rapidly being implemented in South Carolina, serve as a transition point to ensure that overage eighth graders continue to high school. The program exists to achieve dropout prevention and acceleration for overage failing eighth or ninth grade students with little or no high school credit. The primary goal is to accelerate the learning of overage eighth and ninth grade students who have previously failed so that they complete both the eighth and ninth grades in one school year, lowering dropout rates. Learning is based in relevant, career-focused curriculum. The program was first implemented by the PITSCO Corporation of Pittsburg, Kansas for the 2005-2006 school year, and has served 1,222 students in its first five years. Of the 1,222 students, 867 (nearly three quarters) have accelerated to 10<sup>th</sup> grade by the end of the year. Programs generally serve approximately 40 or 80 students per year per location based on the Star Academy model implemented.

#### **Demographics**

- Target Settings: Rural, Urban, Suburban, Inner City
- Target Groups: Overage eighth and ninth graders who are failing and/or have no high school credit.
- SES Code: Statewide

#### **Resources**

- Initial Cost: \$700,000 for an 80-student model
- Annual Cost: The annual cost is dependent on the location and includes nominal consumable and perishable items as well as teacher salaries.
- Funding Source: Funding sources vary. SC EEDA grants, ARC grants, district funds, and state funds have been used to purchase the program.
- Staffing Needs: Each Star Academy is staffed by one program administrator, one guidance counselor, and four facilitators, each certified in the subject they teach.
- Partner Organizations: Pitsco Education, ResCom Education, SC Department of Education, SC Education and Economic Development Act Regional Services.

**Evaluation:** Locations that began the program at the start of the school year experienced high rates of program success with 83% of students ending the year as 10<sup>th</sup> grade students. Only five percent of students didn't complete the course of study. Locations that began the program after the beginning of the school year were considerably less successful, with only 49% of the students ending the year as 10<sup>th</sup> grade students. Sixty-four percent of Academy students improved their school attendance. In the Pickens and Anderson 5 Star Academies, there were 72% fewer behavioral instances amongst academy students.

**Contact Information:** Robin Mussa, Vice President, 888.844.8414, [rmussa@staracademyprogram.org](mailto:rmussa@staracademyprogram.org)



## Initiative #4: GRADUATE GREENVILLE

**Summary:** Graduate Greenville was founded in the spring of 2005 to initiate a community-wide effort to improve high school success and increase the graduation rate. Graduate Greenville has three fundamental components for increasing the high school graduation rate. The first is a culture of high expectations for all students, the second is a commitment to providing extra help and options for potential dropouts, and the third is a community that values education. The vision they have for high school success is known as “The Three R’s” and includes rigor (high expectations for all students), relevance (student coursework and school schedule clearly relate to their lives and goals), and relationships (every student has a number of caring adults who know them, look out for them, and help motivate them.) Graduate Greenville has a number of programs, including a summer enrichment program for ninth graders, an “early warning” system for ninth graders, graduation coaches, mentors for at-risk students, and community involvement and support through “Opening Doors to Success Day.” On this day, community members visit the homes of students that have not returned to school and provide them with materials and resources to help them overcome any obstacles keeping them from returning to school. Each year, the first Saturday after school starts is “Opening Doors to Success Day.”

### Demographics

- Target Settings: Urban, rural
- Target Groups Served: At-risk youth with characteristics associated with dropping out of school
- SES Codes of Schools/Districts Served: Greenville County

### Resources

- Annual Cost: \$550,000
- Funding Sources: Grants, private donations, United Way, Alliance for Quality Education
- Staffing Needs: Director, Program Assistant, Graduation Coaches at school sites
- Infrastructure/Equipment Needs: Summer Program assistance, transportation, guest speakers, field trips
- Partner Organizations: United Way of Greenville County, The Alliance for Quality Education, Greenville County Schools

**Evaluation:** Graduate Greenville collected baseline data in 2005 and set 5-year goals for the progress they hope to have made by 2010. Each year Graduate Greenville tracks and reports their progress.

**Contact Information:** Marge Scieszka at [mscieszka@unitedwaygc.org](mailto:mscieszka@unitedwaygc.org) or call 864.467.2600



## *IV. South Carolina Dropout Rate: Everybody's Responsibility* By Jay Smink, Ph.D.

### **Education Is the Heart of Economic Development**

The people of South Carolina have spoken about their concerns regarding educational excellence in the state. The Riley Institute's Center for Education Policy and Leadership received comments from nearly 800 citizens about how to refocus education in South Carolina in order to meet the demands of the global economy. The Institute's research findings came as no surprise, especially in one arena. Either directly or indirectly, the vast array of responses pertained to the high dropout rate in the public schools of South Carolina. Specifically, for the past several years, only 67% of the starting ninth grade class completed high school on time with a regular diploma in South Carolina. This is a serious and continuing issue that has plagued state policymakers and local school leaders for decades. It is even more critical at this juncture because of the competitiveness of the world economy, particularly as each country, state, or municipality must remain diligent in their economic development efforts to attract new and productive businesses to their locale.

Global competitiveness and economic development clearly must involve strong infrastructures such as roads, business venues, tax incentives, and other favorable environments. However, the most critical component of an economic development plan is to demonstrate an education system that provides an entry-level workforce and a responsive postsecondary education structure leading to continuous educational advancements that serve the growth needs of small businesses and the larger corporate world as they continually examine where they might locate to enhance their competitiveness.

The strongest education incentive to any business is a community that values and supports education with sufficient resources for continuous school improvement efforts. These resources must be targeted to schools so their program improvement efforts can place an emphasis on key indicators such as school attendance, academic achievement, social development, and grade promotion for each individual student. Making these research-backed key areas a priority will eventually lead to increased graduation rates and create a more competitive posture for the community.

### **Dropout Prevention Strategies and Best Practices**

Since 1986, the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) at Clemson University has addressed the issue of low high school completion rates throughout the nation. The focus of the Center's research and technical assistance provided to school and community leaders across the country has been to provide research-based strategies and best practices that lead to immediate and long-term solutions to lower the dropout rate. NDPC has developed several excellent tools that school and community leaders use on a regular basis.

- **Model Program Database.** The first tool, originally developed in 1990, includes a model program database with descriptive information about successful program interventions at all school levels in all types of communities across the nation. This database of Model Programs for Dropout Prevention was recently updated in an effort to keep information current and relevant to today's generation of educators, students, and community members. This information is available on the Center's web page at [www.dropoutprevention.org](http://www.dropoutprevention.org). The model programs are rated based on the research or evaluation made available by the program. The rating scale for the programs selected for the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC)

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database of model programs is based on the evaluation literature of specific prevention, intervention, and recovery programs. The programs have evidence of effectiveness and provide an excellent starting point for local program planners.

• **Effective Strategies to Increase Graduation Rates.** The second tool created by NDPC to serve school and community program leaders is the identification of the 15 most effective strategies to increase high school graduation rates. Released in 2004, the publication, *Helping Students Graduate*, provides a research-based framework for the 15 strategies that individually and collectively represent sound interventions for school- or community-based programs for high-risk students, including students with disabilities. Students report a variety of reasons for dropping out of school; therefore, the solutions are multidimensional. These strategies appear to be independent, but they actually work well together and frequently overlap. Although they can be implemented as stand-alone strategies or programs (i.e., mentoring or family engagement projects), positive outcomes will result when school districts develop a program improvement plan that encompasses most or all of these strategies. These strategies have been successful in all school levels from K-12 and in rural, suburban, or urban centers. The strategies, defined in the appendix, are grouped into four clusters to provide a framework for planning local programs as well as evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention targeted to individual students or for those school-wide interventions. The four clusters are:

#### SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

- ◆ Systemic Renewal
- ◆ School-Community Collaboration
- ◆ Safe Learning Environments

#### EARLY INTERVENTIONS

- ◆ Family Engagement
- ◆ Early Childhood Education
- ◆ Early Literacy Development

#### BASIC CORE STRATEGIES

- ◆ Mentoring/Tutoring
- ◆ Service-Learning
- ◆ Alternative Schooling
- ◆ After-School Opportunities

#### MAKING THE MOST OF INSTRUCTION

- ◆ Professional Development
- ◆ Active Learning
- ◆ Educational Technology
- ◆ Individualized Instruction
- ◆ Career and Technical Education (CTE)

*The elements of these four clusters are described in Appendix B.*

• **Everybody's Responsibility.** The respondents of the Riley Institute's initial survey were very astute and recognized the role of education in advancing not only the quality of life

*"These strategies (created by the National Dropout Prevention Center) have been successful in all school levels from K-12 and in rural, suburban, or urban centers."*



*"...it is imperative that each community develop high expectations for their education program and place a premium on increasing the graduation rate."*

*"Many people may argue that the biggest obstacle to selecting and implementing these interventions is the lack of financial resources to support the new programs; however, NDPC experiences have found financial resources to be only a minor concern."*

*"We need bold action at the schoolhouse, courthouse and statehouse to change these very troubling statistics and projections. If this bold action does not take place, South Carolina will continue to lag behind other states in progress and in global competitiveness"*

for each individual but the competitiveness of the state in the world marketplace. Therefore, it is imperative that each community develop high expectations for their education program and place a premium on increasing the graduation rate. For example, the financial advantage for each high school graduate is approximately \$400,000 in personal lifetime earnings over a high school dropout. Furthermore, a significant cost savings is recognized by society in several arenas such as reducing law enforcement costs and lowering welfare and social service costs associated with individuals who leave school early.

The good news about the nine Key Action Areas identified in the Institute's survey is that there are plenty of "answers available" to address each of these critical issues. These research-based programs and strategies identified by NDPC may be implemented in nearly every school and community in South Carolina. Many people may argue that the biggest obstacle to selecting and implementing these interventions is the lack of financial resources to support the new programs; however, NDPC experiences have found financial resources to be only a minor concern. Furthermore, creative leaders are always able to find the resources, direct funding, or in-kind assistance to do what must be done when it comes to educating our children. Therefore, the biggest obstacle is likely to be one of inertia on the part of the key community stakeholders or school leaders. The next obstacle would be knowing how and where to start, and whom to involve in the planning and implementation efforts.

The Riley Institute, along with the National Dropout Prevention Center and many other similar organizations in the state, is positioned to provide technical assistance and guidance to school and community leaders to move forward to improve the education infrastructures in South Carolina. NDPC has provided similar services to hundreds of schools and communities for more than two decades and remains ready to continue these services when called upon. Lastly, the hardest part of any program improvement venture is getting started. We all need to remember that the task is not easy, and it will remain an ongoing effort. South Carolina has no choice if we expect to remain competitive in the global marketplace. Clearly, dropout prevention and economic development are closely related initiatives, and they are forever a critical priority for each citizen in the state. Education may be considered expensive, but the lack of education is even more expensive. Using the phrase said many times in many different situations—we either pay now, or we pay later.

### **Concluding Statements**

This paper has outlined what is at stake for South Carolina if the dropout crisis is not addressed and we continue to attempt to educate a large number of students in "dropout factories." The statewide initiatives, highlighted earlier in the paper, are promising and show that some progress is being made. The models provided by Clemson's Dropout Prevention Center give us a roadmap to move forward. However, the efforts of South Carolina thus far are too few and too spread out to make a substantial difference across the state. We need bold action at the schoolhouse, courthouse and statehouse to change these very troubling statistics and projections. If this bold action does not take place, South Carolina will continue to lag behind other states in progress and in global competitiveness.



# References

J. Laird, E.F. Catalkdi, A.K. Ramani, and C. Chapman, "Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate of Public High School Students by State: School Year: 2004-2005, NCES 2008-053, Table 12 (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 2008).

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# Appendices

**APPENDIX A:** Description of Early College High Schools, STEM Schools, and New Tech High Schools.

## **I. Early College High Schools**

Early college high schools (ECHS) are schools in which students begin taking college courses during their freshman and sophomore years. Students in these schools often graduate with an associate degree or 60 hours of college credit and report an average graduation rate of 91%. More than one in three ECHS students graduates from high school with both a high school diploma and two years of college credit or an associate's degree. Others earn a range of college credits, shortening their time to degree completion after high school. More than 90% of ECHS 10th graders scored proficient or higher on the OGT assessments in reading, writing, mathematics and social studies, outperforming the State in each of these categories. External research found that these schools facilitate college enrollment and completion. Greater percentages of students from ECHS sites scored either "Accelerated" or "Advanced" on Ohio state achievement tests than students at comparable high schools, suggesting that they are more college ready.

## **II. STEM Schools**

STEM schools prepare students for college and careers in science, technology, engineering and math. Through a public-private partnership, the state of Ohio has supported the development of eight STEM schools (and a network of supportive K-8 STEM programs) around the state. STEM in Ohio has the significant involvement of the Ohio STEM Learning Network and businesses like Battelle Memorial Institute, one of the largest private research firms in the country. The emphasis on these key subject areas also permeates other high school models in the state, including Early College High Schools.

## **III. New Tech High Schools**

With forty high schools across the country, the New Tech Network creates an environment in which teachers are empowered and students are deeply engaged in the kind of learning that is rarely seen in traditional high schools. Unlike students in traditional high schools, where most teachers lecture and use textbooks as a teaching approach, teachers in New Tech high schools design rigorous, real-world projects tied to state and district standards and customize them to their location and the interests of students. As a result, students develop important skills such as critical thinking and collaboration.

There are three elements of a New Tech High School:

1. A new instructional approach that engages learners - Project-based learning (PBL) is at the heart of the instructional approach. PBL uses technology and inquiry to engage students with issues and questions that are relevant to their lives. In New Tech classrooms, teachers design rigorous projects aligned to state and district standards and customize them to their location and the interests of students. Students then work in teams to acquire and apply knowledge and skills to solve problems. Students acquire not only subject-matter knowledge, but also



the skills they need to thrive in college, career and life.

2. A culture that empowers students and teachers - Trust, respect and responsibility are the hallmarks of New Tech culture. At New Tech schools, students and teachers alike have exceptional ownership of school administration and the learning experience. Students acquire a level of responsibility similar to what they would experience in a professional work environment. Working on projects and in teams, students are accountable to their peers, while taking individual responsibility to get work done. In this trusted, respectful environment, students decide how to allocate their time and how to collaborate.
3. Fully applied technology that supports deep learning - Smart use of technology supports innovative approaches to instruction and culture. All classrooms have a one-to-one computer to student ratio. With access to Web-enabled computers, every student becomes a self-directed learner who no longer needs to rely primarily on teachers or textbooks for knowledge and direction. A proprietary Web-based system — New Tech Learning Platform — unifies students' learning experiences, enabling them to share projects online, collaborate, communicate, research and create new knowledge.

Taken from: <http://knowledgeworks.org/action/our-work/our-high-school-work>

#### **APPENDIX B:** Description of Clusters/National Dropout Prevention Center

- ◆ **Systemic Renewal**—Systemic renewal calls for a continuing process of evaluating goals and objectives related to school policies, practices, programs, and organizational structures as they impact a diverse group of learners.
- ◆ **School-Community Collaboration**—When all groups in a community provide collective support to the school, a strong infrastructure of partnerships sustains a caring environment where youth can thrive and achieve.
- ◆ **Safe Learning Environments**—A comprehensive violence prevention plan, including conflict resolution, must deal with potential violence as well as crisis management. A safe learning environment provides daily experiences, at all grade levels, that enhance positive social attitudes and effective interpersonal skills in all students in all classrooms.
- ◆ **Family Engagement**—Research consistently finds that family engagement has a direct, positive effect on children's achievement and is one of the most accurate predictors of a student's success in school.
- ◆ **Early Childhood Education**—Birth-to-five interventions demonstrate that providing a child additional enrichment can enhance brain development. Also, the most effective way to reduce the number of children who will ultimately drop out is to provide the best possible classroom instruction from the beginning of their school experience through the primary grades.
- ◆ **Early Literacy Development**—Early literacy interventions to help low-achieving students improve their reading and writing skills establish the necessary foundation for effective learning in all subjects.
- ◆ **Mentoring/Tutoring**—Mentoring is a one-to-one caring, supportive relationship



between a mentor and a mentee that is based on trust. Mentoring offers a significant support structure for high-risk students. Tutoring, also a one-to-one activity, focuses on academics and is an effective practice when addressing specific needs such as reading, writing, or math competencies.

- ◆ **Service-Learning**—Service-learning connects meaningful community service experiences with academic learning. This teaching/learning method promotes personal and social growth, career development, and civic responsibility and can be a powerful vehicle for effective school reform at all grade levels.
- ◆ **Alternative Schooling**—Alternative schooling provides potential dropouts a variety of options that can lead to graduation, with programs paying special attention to the student’s individual social needs, workforce skills, and academic requirements for a high school diploma.
- ◆ **After-School Opportunities**—Many schools provide after-school and summer enhancement programs that eliminate information loss and inspire interest in a variety of areas. Such experiences are especially important for students at risk of school failure because they fill the afternoon “gap time” with constructive and engaging activities.
- ◆ **Professional Development**—Teachers and counselors who work with youth at high risk of academic failure need to feel supported and have an avenue by which they can continue to develop skills and techniques, and learn about innovative strategies.
- ◆ **Active Learning**—Differentiated learning embraces teaching and learning strategies that engage and involve students in the learning process. Students find new and creative ways to solve problems and achieve success, and they become lifelong learners when educators show them that there are different ways to learn.
- ◆ **Educational Technology**—Technology offers some of the best opportunities for delivering instruction by engaging students in authentic learning, addressing multiple intelligences, and adapting to students’ learning styles. Online learning and credit recovery options are key approaches to use.
- ◆ **Individualized Instruction**—Each student has unique interests and past learning experiences. An individualized instructional plan for each student allows for flexibility in teaching methods and motivational strategies to consider these individual differences.
- ◆ **Career and Technical Education (CTE)**—A quality CTE program and a related career guidance program are essential for all students. School-to-work programs recognize that youth need specific skills to prepare them for the increased demands of today’s workplace.

Taken from: <http://www.dropoutprevention.org/home>