

## **School + diploma = \$18K more pay Report defines high price of dropping out.**

By CINDY STAUFFER, Staff Writer

Don't do drugs. Brush your teeth. Stay in school.

All are rules that make sense for kids but a new report makes it painfully clear just how much sense the last rule makes.

Drop out of high school in Lancaster County?

You'll make about \$24,000 a year, about \$18,000 less than the \$42,000 annual salary of a local resident with a bachelor's degree from college.

The poverty rate for high school dropouts in Lancaster County is about 12.4 percent. That's about twice the 6.6 percent poverty rate for those who graduate and three times the 3.1 percent rate for those who earn a bachelor's degree.

Those figures are included in a report issued today by the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, an advocacy group located in Harrisburg.

Overall, the report shows that kids who drop out of school face a less lucrative lifestyle than those who finish or earn some college education.

The report urges schools to provide support to keep kids in school and outreach to those who are teetering on the edge.

The report came out on the same day as a national report prepared by an advocacy group called the Education Trust. That report showed that one in four kids is dropping out of high school.

In the statewide report, Lancaster County fared a bit better than other areas across the state.

Here, the unemployment rate among high school dropouts was 3.7 percent, versus 10.1 percent statewide. Still, for county residents who had a bachelor's or higher degree from college, the unemployment rate was just 1.9 percent. In the state, the rate was 2.5 percent for college graduates.

Countywide, the average graduation rate was 91 percent in 2007, according to state Department of Education statistics released earlier this year.

The report released today suggests several ways to retain or reach out to struggling students, including providing support to kids who have reading problems, providing connections to local employers or college programs, and providing chances to learn in non-traditional ways.

Some local school districts already are following the recommended methods.

The School District of Lancaster has a 65.8 percent graduation rate, one of the lower rates in the county. The district is actively engaged in trying to increase that rate, said superintendent Pedro Rivera.

The district offers several alternative education programs, allowing students to take classes at night or later in the day, in a condensed structure, for teens who work or already have children. It provides self-paced, small-group instruction for kids who have failed in a traditional classroom setting.

Kids who are struggling with reading and math in ninth grade get a double dose of those classes.

The district pays the tuition of students who are taking college classes while still in high school, to get a jump start on life.

The district also has a Future Planning Center, where it urges students to think about what they will do after high school and begin preparing for that.

"We're trying to use every minute of every day to immerse kids in thinking about the future and making good choices," Rivera said. "It's showing them how to get there and be productive young adults."

Columbia School District, which had a graduation rate of 79.6 percent in 2007, is trying some new ways to engage teens in thinking about their future, and staying in school, said counselor Peggy Woods.

Students are enrolled in career units as early as seventh grade. All ninth-graders take a career choices class, which discusses how education affects income and how to set goals for the future. It gets kids who may be thinking they are headed for the NBA to consider realistic alternatives, Woods said.

"We set up a 10-year plan, from age 14 to 24. How are you going to get there?" Woods said.