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Graduate Greenville launches summer assault on dropout rate

By Ron Barnett
STAFF WRITER

If you've decided to drop out of high school and don't show up for class this fall, you can expect a knock at your door.

It won't be a truant officer, though.

It might be the mayor. Or the superintendent. Or a lawyer, a teacher or a grandmother. "We're going to show them that we care about them," said Greenville City Councilwoman Diane Smock, who heads a committee planning that effort.

The one-day blitz for missing students is just one part of a four-pronged assault on the high school dropout rate that a group called Graduate Greenville is planning for the summer.

The group announced plans Tuesday to establish a summer camp for rising ninth-graders, to develop a computerized "early warning" system to identify at-risk ninth-graders, and to hire two "graduation coaches."

The coalition, which includes the Greenville County school district, the Alliance for Quality Education, the United Way of Greenville County and other groups, is targeting Berea and Greenville High schools for its initial attack. Travelers Rest High also will take part in the early warning system.

But the group hopes to expand the effort to all high schools in the district eventually, said Frank Holleman, a member of the Graduate Greenville board who is a former deputy U.S. Secretary of Education.

The group held a news conference at Berea High to announce the program, which is the culmination of a year of research involving 800 people in the community, including input from several dropouts.

Superintendent Phinnize Fisher said the project is an example of the strong community support in the district, and of community concern for each student.

"Schools are about communities and people and involvement," she said. "Schools can't do it alone."

YOU CAN HELP

Call the Alliance for Quality Education, 233-4133

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