

## **The Greenville News**

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### **Group works to boost graduation in Greenville**

The Greenville News Editorial

A student who drops out of high school often faces bleak prospects in the working world, and so a community initiative aimed at improving the graduation rate in Greenville is not only welcome but essential. The organization Graduate Greenville plans a four-pronged approach to reducing the dropout rate, including visiting students who don't show up for the first week of school this fall.

Other plans include establishing a summer camp for rising ninth-graders, developing a computerized warning system to identify at-risk ninth-graders, and hiring two graduation coaches. The initiative has broad community support from prominent community leaders, elected officials and such groups as the Alliance for Quality Education, the United Way of Greenville County and others.

Graduate Greenville's efforts gained added urgency recently when the national magazine Education Week found that South Carolina has the worst graduation rate in the nation. The state graduation rate was 53.8 percent with Greenville's only slightly higher at 54.7 percent -- compared to the national average of 69.9 percent.

The state disputes Education Week's graduation rate, calculating it at a much higher 74.2 percent. But state education officials agree the graduation rate is poor compared to the rest of the nation.

State Education Department spokesman Jim Foster said in The Greenville News that the state's "graduation rate has been low for generations." Foster was right in pointing out a hard truth: "Our state's culture historically has not valued a high school education. And it used to be possible to make a decent living without one."

Those days are past. In an increasingly competitive global economy, a high school diploma is essential for securing a good job and a promising future. The Washington, D.C.-based Alliance for Excellent Education estimated that 85 percent of today's jobs and almost 90 percent of the fastest-growing high-wage jobs will require not only a high school diploma but some higher education.

Underscoring that is a striking disparity between the wages earned by high school graduates and college graduates. Education Week found that in geographic areas where most workers have a high school education or less, the median income was \$12,638. That compares to an income of \$59,113 in areas where most workers have a bachelor's degree.

In recent years, the state has taken some bold steps in trying to increase the graduation rate. The Education and Economic Development Act was adopted in 2005 to make school

more relevant and give students more direction as they look toward entering the work force.

As a part of the act, all eighth-graders are being required to take classes designed to give them more background in career options. By getting students to think actively about their working life after school, state officials hope students will have a greater appreciation for the importance of their education -- understanding how schooling leads directly to a career. They will be more motivated, work harder, stay in school and graduate.

The state also has made considerable investments in early education to help ensure all children are ready to learn. In addition, state leaders have sought to make the public school curriculum more rigorous to improve academic achievement.

A sad fact is that young people who drop out of school often get involved with crime. At best, they may avoid wrongdoing but still lack the education needed to survive in a competitive economy that places an ever-larger priority on skills and knowledge. That's why state efforts to reduce the dropout rate and local initiatives such as Graduate Greenville are crucial in helping young people to succeed in school and their communities to thrive.

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