

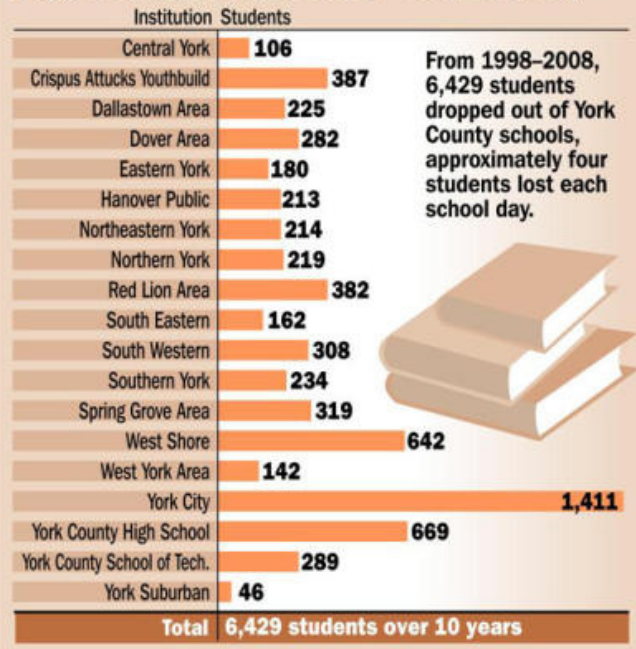


More than 6,400 York County dropouts in 10 years

ANDREW SHAW *The York Dispatch*

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High school dropouts in York County



SOURCE: STAY IN SCHOOL INITIATIVE REPORT TODD STOUCH — *The York Dispatch*

More than 6,400 children around York County have dropped out of school in the past decade, representing a loss of education, a loss of productivity and a loss of millions of dollars to the county, according to a United Way of York County report being presented Monday.

Student truancy and dropout rates will be the subject of the Kids, Truancy and a County at Risk program at 6:30 p.m. at Dover Area High School.

The report's findings will be the focus of the presentation, showing truancy and dropouts are a problem in every school district, not just York City.

The financial impact is mammoth, as the findings show each additional high school graduate has a net economic advantage to the county of about \$127,000.

If the 6,400-plus students who dropped out the past decade had graduated, York County would have been the economic beneficiary of about \$816 million, due to increased tax revenue and decreased spending on programs focusing on juvenile problems.

That's why officials want to infuse dropout prevention programs with more funding. But they also want to reduce truancy, which they believe is the instigator.

Truancy's role: Truancy too often leads to dropouts, teen delinquency and pregnancy, and prison time, said Bev Mackereth, executive director of York County Human Services.

"Truancy is a symptom. It's either a symptom of a problem within a family, or a symptom of a problem within a school," Mackereth said. "We could prevent it."

Mackereth will be one of several officials

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attending the event. YorkCounts, a nonprofit group aimed at improving quality of life, produced the report in conjunction with United Way.

"It's not a situation where you can just point the finger at schools and say, you aren't doing your job," said Bob Woods, one of the report's co-chairs. "It's a community problem."

Solutions: Beyond an analysis of the problems, the report includes some solutions that will be discussed in length Monday.

One recommendation is to expand the work of the York County Truancy Task Force, led by York County Common Pleas Judge John Uhler. The task force works with every York County district, collecting data, establishing truancy protocols and working with truant students.

Uhler said he's been focusing on truancy for a decade, but only recently has it begun to become more of a community issue.

"Just because we have this (task force), it's not like we wave a magic wand and it's corrected. As an issue, it's an ongoing one we need to focus on," Uhler said.

Woods said they are also recommending that businesses start encouraging employees to get their high school diplomas, and to expand use of high school freshmen orientation program Link Crew, used in York City, Southern York and South Western school districts.

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