



Meetings aim to curb truancy

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Within the past 10 years, an average of four students per school day dropped out of York County schools.

And that's an expensive problem for the community, local experts said Monday during the first of a series of town hall meetings aimed at keeping student in school.

YorkCounts and the Dover Area School District hosted the event which focused on the United Way of York County's Stay in School Initiative Report To The Community.

About 50 people, including school officials from across the county, were at the meeting which was held at Dover Area High School.

The report indicated that a direct correlation exists between truancy and crime, said Don Gogniat, co-chairman of the Stay in School Initiative.

The initiative's research found that, according to Pennsylvania Department of Correction's 2007 data, 41 percent of people in York County Prison did not graduate from high school, he said.

"This isn't just a city problem, these facts are real," Gogniat said. "This is a problem that has to

be solved."

Learning difficulties and family problems rank among the reasons who students drop out of school, he said.

Dover school board member Rob McIlvaine talked of the "economic disaster" truancy will cause.

"As our workforce dwindles, we're going to find ourselves, I believe, labor crunched," he said.

Students represent York County's future, McIlvaine said.

Curricula must be engaging and teachers play a critical role in helping students want to stay in school, he said.

Also, employers must work with their school districts to identify career opportunities for students, McIlvaine said.

"The challenge is ...We have an awful lot of work to do," he said.

Bob Woods, executive director of the United Way of York County, said recommendations to reduce the county's dropout rate include enhancing the effectiveness of local schools and expanding the county's truancy prevention initiative.

The problem of truant behavior begins in a child's early years, said Bev Mackereth, York County director of human services.

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"Government cannot be parents," she said. "We have to send a clear message that truancy isn't allowed."

ABOUT THE REPORT

According to United Way of York County's Stay in School Initiative Report to the Community, from 1998 to 2008, 6,429 students dropped out of York County schools.

To improve the area's graduation rate, the Stay in School Initiative Committee recommends:

- Enhance the effectiveness of York County schools
- Expand the work of the York County Truancy Task Force
- Promote and foster supportive communities
- Engage the business community

To view the entire report, visit www.unitedway-york.org

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