



York County truancy summit works toward 'action report' (video)

ANDREW SHAW The York Dispatch

Updated: 09/22/2010 01:09:42 PM EDT

They were separated by just a few cafeteria tables inside the York County School of Technology on Tuesday evening for the first York County Truancy Summit.

But the simultaneous sessions with a group of students in one area and a group of adults in another were looking at truancy -- illegally missing school -- at completely different angles.

The adults, mostly educators and those from social agencies, were brainstorming ways to reduce truancy -- ideas mostly focused on making businesses have incentives to make students complete their education, promoting internships and having the court system help families address housing and other needs that would otherwise lead to truant children.

A few dozen feet away sat the object

of the adult discussion, students who have had trouble with the law and truancy.

There was no discussion of business-related incentives to stay in school, and many of the students shook their heads when asked if they were aware of some of the programs offered to help them stay in school.

The discussion, instead, mostly focused on students who said school wasn't a priority when they were dealing with violence, absent or neglectful parents, poverty and a lack of support from others that would otherwise give them motivation to stay in school.

Looking for causes: Those ongoing conversations, all aimed at finding causes that lead to truancy and executable ideas to address it, were all part of the summit. The first-time event was organized by the York County Truancy Prevention Initiative, an effort by a group of various stakeholders to reduce truancy.

Jonathan Queen, the keynote speaker, was somewhat of the poster child for the summit. The York City resident became a high school dropout and teen parent before getting arrested and spending a decade in prison. He has since become a motivational speaker and author, using his life experience to relate to students.

During a students-only session, Queen only got murmurs at first from the teenagers as he asked them about what's prevented them from going to school. Then Queen reminded them he's been there before, and that they poor choices in the



We focus on automating Marriott® Hotels' global invoice process. So they don't have to.

Learn more at RealBusiness.com

Ready For Real Business **xerox**

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



past can still be remedied.

"I'm proud of who I am now. I'm proud of who I've become. Y'all can't be shy about that," Queen told students during the breakout session in the cafeteria.

Queen also brought a group of high schoolers who had been through much the same struggles, as they spoke first with students and then to the entire summit.

William Penn Senior High School senior Ginia Moorehead told the audience about her experience failing ninth grade and having a baby, a time when she was worried about having clothes to wear, let alone attend school.

"I know what it's like when nobody is there for you," she said.

She soon found support through social workers at the school, and is now ready to graduate and go on to York College, where she has a scholarship.

Classmate Tiffany Hill said her mom's series of bad decisions and the shooting death of her friend left her struggling and racking up fines for being late to school. An afterschool program, Quantum Opportunities, led by Mike Smith, turned her life around.

"I made it. I proved everyone wrong," Tiffany said.

Many don't make it: But there are many

students who don't make it, Queen said, and that's why he implored officials to do something about truancy "immediately."

Four York County students drop out of school every day, he said, citing statistics from a recent YorkCounts report on truancy. YorkCounts is a nonprofit, quality-of-life group that has been one of the supporters of the truancy prevention initiative in the county, along with the York County Bar Association and United Way, among others.

Members of the initiative expect to soon have an "action report" with ways to enact ideas that came from the summit.

York County Common Pleas Judge John Uhler, who has championed truancy prevention for years, said York County needs to unify and have a group response if anything is going to be accomplished. Uhler is chair of the initiative's executive committee.

"We need to have a community cause," Uhler said.

-- Reach Andrew Shaw at 505-5431, ashaw@yorkdispatch.com or twitter.com/ydblogwork.

Help people in need.

Donate your car, boat or RV

Free Towing ■ Tax Deductible

FREE
3 day vacation to over
80 destinations.

Call Toll-Free

1-877-225-9384



Print Powered By FormatDynamics™