

on Michigan's Communities

July 8, 2009

One Community: Multiple Options for Dropout Prevention and Recovery

The goal of this publication is to profile child advocacy efforts of one or more of Michigan's communities to encourage networking and sharing of advocacy strategies. This issue highlights **Education Re-connection** and the multiple pathways Kalamazoo County utilizes to ensure the graduation of their alternative education students.

In September 2007, the Kalamazoo Community Foundation received a \$100,000 planning grant from the C.S. Mott Foundation to support a 24 month project to develop an agenda for out-of-school youth in the county. Education Re-connection was formed with the primary goal of clearly defining how disconnected youth can enter or re-enter a program that will lead to high school completion. The project included representation from several sectors including community, education, advocacy, business, government and philanthropy.

In Kalamazoo County, approximately 360 students either drop out or are excluded from school each year. The work of dropout prevention comes from many places in the community; however, the dropout problem generally comes to full recognition during high school. In response to this need, many districts offer programs in alternative and adult education, as well as credit recovery programs within traditional high school. Each of these programs utilizes different combinations of teaching strategies and support services for students in efforts to maintain students and ensure that they are able to persist to graduation. Highlights on each program are provided below.

Portage Community High School has a staff of nineteen, and includes two licensed social workers. Portage Community High School provides a Special Curriculum offering a more flexible program of study than a traditional school. Unlike many other alternative high school programs, on-line learning programs are not part of the curriculum. The philosophy of the school includes the belief that an important element of learning involves the acquisition of social skills developed through frequent student-adult and student-peer interactions. All staff have been trained in Starr Commonwealth's No Disposable Kids¹ conflict management program. Additionally, the school has initiated school-wide Positive Behavioral Supports². For more information on this program, contact Craig Ross at (269) 323-6766, or via email at cross@PortagePS.org.

¹ No Disposable Kids is a powerful training program that encompasses school children as well as educational staff and parents. For more information on No Disposable Kids, call (800) 315-8640 or visit the Web site at www.ndk.org

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<http://www.michiganschildren.org/images/stories/FocusonMichigansCommunities/focus%20on%20michigan%20communities-miblsi.doc>

Barclay Alternative Education Center is a program of Parchment Public Schools and is designed to assist young people in either obtaining their high school diploma or G.E.D. Various credit retrieval options are available including online coursework through NovaNet. Barclay Hills works with Education for the Arts to offer elective classes in Hip-hop dance, Sculpture, Improv and Performance Poetry. The program also works with MSU Extension services to offer nutrition and parenting classes for parenting students. Recently, Barclay Hills staff was trained in Positive Behavior Support, a school-wide discipline program which focuses on rewarding positive behavior. For more information, contact Principal Kares Hanley at (269) 488-1470 Khanley@parchment.k12.mi.us

Comstock Alternative High School, a.k.a **Compass High**, offers students two educational options; they can choose to complete a high school diploma or earn a GED equivalent. The program provides smaller class sizes than the traditional public school, and instructors teach not only teach the Michigan Merit Curriculum, but also unique project-based, technology-centered courses allowing for individualized instruction and learning. The program provides onsite childcare and other special supports for pregnant and parenting teens. Classes are available throughout the day, including evening course options. In addition, the school offers classes through *NovaNET*³, an on line, self paced curriculum. Students can also obtain course credit by participating in community service. The high school also offers a dual enrollment option in partnership with Kalamazoo Valey Community College. For more information on Comstock's program, contact Principal Jay Birchmeier at 269-388-9477 birchmeierj@comstockps.org

Loy Norrix High School, a program of Kalamazoo Public Schools was designed to provide pregnant and parenting teens an opportunity to complete the requirements for a high school diploma by combining academic classes with child-care support, parenting skills and social and health services at one convenient location. Loy Norrix also houses the Jump Start program. This program is designed to serve students who are struggling with behavior issues, and offers short-term and long-term intervention strategies depending on the needs of the student. For more information about this program, contact the Loy Norrix High School Guidance Department at 269-337-0212.

The **Extended Thinking Center** through Kalamazoo Central High School provides an alternative placement option for students who have exhausted other in-school options for intervention. Students are placed in the program for a period of 5-10 days in lieu of an at-home suspension. Students receive homework from their regular schedule in an effort to maintain credit. In addition to regular coursework, students receive one block each day of a "pro-social skills curriculum" that focuses on behavior change. The program works in concert with the School's "All Giants Achieve" program... For more information on this program, contact Principal Von Washington at (269) 337-0100.

The **Strict Discipline Academy**, a.k.a. the Youth Advancement Academy, was first chartered through Kalamazoo Regional Educational Services Agency (K-RESA) to provide an alternative high school experience for suspended and expelled students and students who are under court jurisdiction. The program provides these students with the ability to earn high school credit classes, obtain counseling interventions and instruction on goal setting and employability skills. This program replaced Reach and Teach, a program that served Kalamazoo Public Schools secondary students with disciplinary problems. The program was piloted in the 2008-09 school year and is being re-vamped for 09-10 through a contract with Ombudsman Educational Services⁴, a national educational services company.

The **Student Success Center** at **Kalamazoo Valley Community College** is a new program introduced in the Winter of 2007, and is designed facilitate students in accessing every resource they need in order to proficiently manage their way through the KVCC environment. Students who participate in the program are assigned a “Success Advocate” who will guide them through their time at KVCC in order to help assure the student’s attainment of their particular goal. The advocate is a trained resource person who understands the complexities of college life and the college environment. For more information, visit <http://www.kvcc.edu/successcenter/faq.htm#1>

Virtual High School is a private, nonprofit program provided by **Schoolcraft Public Schools**. VHS provides on-line courses for credit to students who either need them to graduate or want to accelerate. For more information about VHS visit <http://www.mivhs.org>

Youth Opportunities Unlimited is a program of Kalamazoo RESA which provides the venue and supports that allow YOU programs to meet State of Michigan school code requirements and MI Works! which provides funding for much of the programs. YOU offers students the ability to recover credits through GED preparation and Work Keys. Youth served under the YOU program were also provided with summer youth employment programming.

Education Re-Connection is now entering the implementation phase of their planning initiatives. From September 1, 2009 through August 31, 2012, the initiative will focus on the provision of a direct service structure that will utilize navigation and mentoring supports to reach out to identify high school dropouts aged 16 through 19 in Kalamazoo County to support them in re-entering and completing a high school education and/or career training. For more information on this initiative, contact Carrie Pickett Erway, Senior Community Investment Officer, Kalamazoo Community Foundation, at (269) 381-4416.

If you would like to find out how your community can be profiled for your innovative work in any arena of child and family services, contact Michele Corey at 1-800-330-8674 or 1-517-485-3500, or via email at corey.michele@michiganschildren.org.

⁴ http://www.ombudsman.com/about_ombudsman.aspx