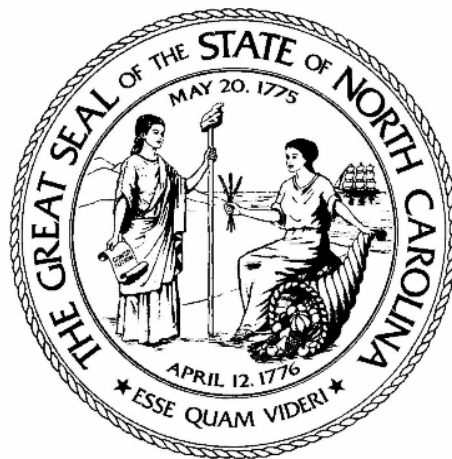


HOUSE SELECT STUDY COMMITTEE

ON

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

AND DROP OUT RATES



**REPORT TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
2007 NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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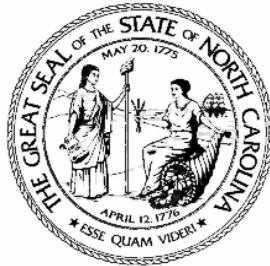
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STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA



HOUSE SELECT STUDY COMMITTEE ON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION
AND DROP OUT RATES

March 7, 2007

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE 2007
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Attached for your consideration is the final report to the House of Representatives of the 2007 General Assembly. This report was prepared by the House Select Committee on High School Graduation and Drop Out Rates pursuant to G.S. 120-19.6(a) and Rule 26(a) of the Rules of the House of Representatives of the 2005 General Assembly.

Respectfully submitted,

Representative Earline Parmon, Chair

Representative Thomas Wright, Chair

SPEAKER JIM BLACK ANNOUNCES HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND DROP OUT RATES

*“State and local leaders, educators and parents must find better ways to reduce drop out rates so we can keep our kids in the classroom, not on the streets,”
says Black.*

RALEIGH – N.C. House Speaker Jim Black (D-Mecklenburg) today announced the creation of a new legislative committee that will spend the next several months studying North Carolina’s drop out rate and recommend ways to keep students in school to ensure they receive a quality education, graduate, and go onto college and good paying jobs.

The House Select Committee on High School Graduation and Drop Out Rates will be chaired by Reps. Earline Parmon (D-Forsyth) and Thomas Wright (D-New Hanover). Other members of the committee include Reps. Bernard Allen (D-Wake), Larry Bell (D-Sampson), Jean Farmer-Butterfield (D-Edgecombe), Susan Fisher (D-Buncombe), Rick Glazier (D-Cumberland), Maggie Jeffus (D-Guilford), Ed Jones (D-Halifax), Mary McAllister (D-Cumberland), Marian McLawhorn (D-Pitt), Louis Pate (R-Wayne), Ray Rapp (D-Madison), Joe Tolson (D-Edgecombe), Tracy Walker (R-Wilkes), Edith Warren (D-Pitt), Jennifer Weiss (D-Wake) and Laura Wiley (R-Guilford).

“Education must be our state’s number one priority,” said Speaker Black. “We have to remain vigilant to ensure that every child in North Carolina comes to school ready to learn and stays in school until graduation. Our schools are losing too many students due to discipline problems, gangs, long-term suspensions, or simply because they turn 16. State and local leaders, educators and parents must find better ways to reduce drop out rates so we can keep our kids in the classroom, not on the streets.”

The House Select Committee on High School Graduation and Drop Out Rates will study:

- The impact of dropping out of school on the student;
- The fiscal impact of raising the compulsory attendance age above the current 16 years old;
- The capacity of a 16-year-old to understand the social and economic consequences of dropping out of school;
- The law in other states and the experience of other states that have raised the compulsory age;
- The emergence of major high school reform efforts, including *Learn and Earn* Programs, the New Schools Initiative, and 21st Century Schools, and the impact they have on teenagers who remain in school longer;
- The importance to the entire State of every student leaving high school prepared to enter the workforce or succeed in higher education;
- Research on factors related to students’ success in school;
- Strategies, programs and support services that should be provided if the compulsory school attendance age is raised to enable students to graduate from

high school, and time lines for implementing those strategies, programs and support services;

- Related laws and policies that must be addressed to ensure the availability of support services for students;
- Possible exemptions from the law for certain students, including those who fulfill their graduation requirements early and receive a diploma, complete an alternative education program, or whose parents consent to their leaving school before they graduate or reach the maximum compulsory age;
- The fiscal impact on the Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Department of Correction; and
- Input on the issue from school personnel, dropouts, and students at risk of dropping out of school.

“A student who graduates from high school is less likely to grow up and live in poverty and has a much greater chance at a prosperous and rewarding future,” said Rep. Earline Parmon (D-Forsyth), who will co-chair the new committee. “I’m hopeful this Committee will discover how to increase graduation rates and, by association, how to improve the lives of the young people of North Carolina.”

“Our state’s drop out numbers are unacceptable,” said Rep. Thomas Wright (D-New Hanover), who will co-chair the new committee. “We need to find out why our students are leaving school and how to keep them there.”

State Board of Education Chairman Howard Lee has called on the General Assembly to change the state’s compulsory age law, which currently allows a student to drop out of school at 16 years old. “We do students a disservice to send the message that it is acceptable to drop out of school when they are 16 years old,” Chairman Lee said in March in response to the release of the latest drop out statistics. “A high school diploma is a minimum requirement for future success, and we will continue to press for changing the compulsory school attendance age.” Raising the compulsory age is one issue that the House Select Committee will examine in the coming months.

Education Week Magazine recently cited a national study showing North Carolina’s high school graduation rate at 66 percent. Among African American males it is 49 percent and Hispanic males graduate only 47 percent. North Carolina’s high school dropout rate, already too high, may be even worse this year, the state’s top-ranking education official warned last week. State Superintendent of Public Instruction June Atkinson said the state’s annual report on high school dropouts is due to be released in December. School officials shouldn’t expect encouraging news, she said during a speech in Elizabeth City.

During the 2004-05 school year, approximately one out of every 20 North Carolina high school students dropped out of school thus jeopardizing their potential for future success, according to the Annual Dropout Event Report presented to the State Board of Education in March. This equates to an annual high school drop out rate of 4.7 percent. State law requires that school officials record the reason for a student’s decision to drop out of school. In 2004-05, 60 percent of students dropped out due to attendance issues. Other key issues included enrollment in a community college (10 percent) and “moved, school

status unknown” (8 percent). Nearly 5 percent of dropouts were related to student suspension and incarceration.

North Carolina is ranked 45th in the nation in the percent of ninth graders who graduate four years later, with only 41 percent entering college and 19 percent graduating with an associate or bachelor degree within six years. (*Source: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2004*)

Furthermore, our state’s dropout rate has a tremendous impact on our economy and society. A high school dropout in 2000 had less than a 50 percent chance of getting a job. That figure drops to 25 percent for African-American students. The dropout’s job will earn less than half of what the same job earned 20 years ago. Wages are increasing only for those with at least a college education, and a lack of education is increasingly correlated with incarceration and a dependence on welfare. (*Source: School Redesign Network, 2002*)

State legislators and Governor Mike Easley have initiated several new programs in recent years aimed at increasing high school graduation rates and encouraging more students to attend college. The *Learn and Earn* early college high schools initiative provides high school students the opportunity to graduate in five years with a high school diploma and an associate’s degree or two years of college credit. Legislators have approved funding for 33 *Learn and Earn* high schools that are currently in operation across the state. Twenty additional *Learn and Earn* schools are slated to open in 2007.

During this year’s session, legislators approved an extra \$27 million for the Disadvantaged Students Supplemental Fund, \$42 million for low-wealth schools, and restored \$44 million in discretionary cuts approved during the state’s economic recession and budget shortfalls in recent years. This new funding, coupled with more than \$150 million provided during the last several years to these schools, will help struggling students stay in school and increase our graduation rate.

In September 2003, with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, North Carolina launched the New Schools Project to assist in the creation of small, economic development-themed high schools across the state. The smaller high schools focus on growing economies and job sectors by offering classes in health care, computer technology, biotech and engineering based on a student’s interests and possible future career. Currently, 25 new schools are open across the state with plans to open 10 more in 2007. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has awarded more than \$20 million in grants to fund this new program.

Last month, Easley launched a statewide effort to conduct performance audits in all 115 school districts to ensure accountability and the smart, targeted use of resources in the state’s public high schools. The State Board of Education and the N.C. Department of Public Instruction are working with the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Education to examine student achievement data and spending patterns from high schools across the state. The information will be used to contrast the resources in low-performing high schools with higher performing schools that educate similar populations of students. Researchers will then conduct site visits in districts with low-performing high schools to identify how they can better use resources to increase student achievement.

The House Select Committee on High School Graduation and Drop Out Rates will hold numerous meetings between now and the start of the 2007 session, which convenes on January 24. The Committee, which includes former school teachers and principals, will present its legislative recommendations to the full House of Representatives at the start of the 2007 session. Legislators are expected to hold meetings in Raleigh and in other cities across the state as they study the state's high school graduation and drop out rates and look at possible solutions.

STUDY COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

The House Select Committee on High School Graduation and Drop Out Rates met five times between October 17, 2006 and December 20, 2006.

October 17, 2006

At this organizational meeting, the House Select Committee on High School Graduation and Drop Out Rates reviewed the issues to be studied and heard suggestions from Committee members about future agenda items.

October 24, 2006

The House Select Committee heard first from Dr. June Atkinson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Dr. Atkinson stated that she is focused on the need to increase the high school graduation rate in North Carolina and that the current dropout rate is unacceptable.

She stated that the State needs to set high benchmarks in order to reach a 100% high school graduation rate. Many school districts are moving aggressively to address the dropout rate but many others need to move more quickly. Superintendents and principals have been encouraged to set a benchmark of having at least an 85% graduation rate in the next 3 years.

Many of the school districts are in the process of redesigning their high schools, focusing on remedial programs in high school to improve reading comprehension, providing engaging learning, and using technology in meaningful ways as strategies to address the dropout problem.

Dr. Atkinson explained to the Committee that the current dropout rate is really based on the total number of dropout events that occur during a year. If a student drops out multiple times then each time that the student drops out is counted as a separate event. Therefore, individual students may be counted as dropouts in more than one school year.

For the first time this year, a new cohort graduation rate will be used. The cohort graduation rate is calculated based on the number of students who begin the ninth grade in any year and those who finish high school 4 years later. The anticipated 2002-03 cohort graduation rate is expected to be in the 60% to low 70% range.

Next, the Committee heard from Mr. Eddie Davis, President of the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE). Mr. Davis stated that NCAE believes that the compulsory attendance age should be gradually raised from 16 to 17 and then 17 to 18. Mr. Davis also presented the National Association of Educators' (NEA) 12-step plan to reduce school dropouts (See [Appendix C](#)). The NEA plan proposes to mandate high school graduation or its equivalency for everyone below the age of 21. The NEA also proposes the establishment of "high school graduation centers for students 19-21 years old to provide specialized instruction and counseling to all students in this older age group who would be more effectively addressed in classes apart from younger students."

Next, Dr. Chris Cobitz, Reporting Section Chief for Accountability Services. DPI explained the new cohort graduation rate (See Appendix D). Later this year, the State will be able to report the percentage of 9th graders who began in the 2002-03 school year and graduated before June 30, 2006. This is a standardized reporting method that will allow comparison with other states. Finally, Dr. Ken Gattis, Senior Research and Evaluation Coordinator, DPI explained the current definition of a dropout, how the dropout rate is calculated and information about the demographics of dropouts.

November 2, 2006

The House Select Committee on High School Graduation and Drop Out Rates held an evening meeting at West Charlotte High School. The Committee heard presentations from the speakers listed on the following agenda about restructuring a large high school into smaller schools within a school, the importance of nontraditional and alternative schools, a successful community-based program aimed at preventing drop outs, and the partnerships that the community college and local public schools have developed to address the dropout problem. Members of the public not listed on the agenda were invited to address the Committee with their concerns, especially about the need to raise the compulsory school attendance age. A summary of the minutes from this meeting can be found in Appendix A.

AGENDA November 2, 2006 6:00 P.M., West Charlotte High School Charlotte, NC

Welcome/Introductions
Representative Parmon, Cochair
Representative Wright, Cochair

Approval of Minutes

Speakers

Ann Clark, Assistant Superintendent, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Jo Ella Ferrell, Principal, Garinger High School

Carol Rodd, Case Manager, Garinger High School

Brian Freeland, Teacher, Garinger High School

Natasha Thompson, Principal, International Studies School at Garinger High School

Herman Gloster, Teacher, International Studies School at Garinger High School

LaPorsha Holt, Student, International Studies School at Garinger High School

Barry Blair, Principal, New Technology High School at Garinger High School

Erica Luttschyn, Teacher, New Technology High School at Garinger High School

Basma Metwally, Student, New Technology High School at Garinger High School
Omneya Metwally, Adult Sister to Basma representing her mother, New Technology High School at Garinger High School
Paulina Ameneyro, Student, New Technology High School at Garinger High School
Hilda Ramirez, Parent of Paulina, New Technology High School at Garinger High School

Sherry Sigmon, Principal, Performance Learning Center
Tasha Sherrill, Teacher, Performance Learning Center
Debbie DeLong, Teacher, Performance Learning Center
LaTasha Harris, Student, Performance Learning Center
Matthew Brady, Student, Performance Learning Center

Dr. Ricky Woods, Senior Minister, First Baptist Church West, Charlotte, NC

JJ McEachern, Associate Dean of Enrollment and Student Services, Central Piedmont Community College, Charlotte, NC

Bobby Sutton, Central Piedmont Community College, Charlotte, NC

December 13, 2006

The House Select Committee on High School Graduation and Drop Out Rates held a morning meeting at the Education Center and toured an alternative school, Central Haywood High School, in Clyde, North Carolina. The Committee heard presentations from the speakers listed on the following agenda about successful programs to address the dropout rate, including an alternative high school, an early college program and a community-based program that helps dropouts return to the public schools or pursue further education at the community college. A summary of the minutes from this meeting can be found in [Appendix A](#).

AGENDA December 13, 2006 10 A.M., Education Center Clyde, NC

Welcome/Introductions
Representative Parmon, Cochair
Representative Wright, Cochair

Approval of Minutes

Speakers

Welcome	Dr. Anne Garrett , Superintendent
Overview of Speakers/Concerns	Dr. Bill Nolte , Associate Superintendent
Central Haywood High School	Phil Pressley , Principal
Haywood Early College	Dr. Doris Hipps , Dean/Principal

WIA Gateway Recovery

Kyle Ledford, WIA Youth Program Manager

Steve Williams, Student Services Director

Students

Jason King
Ashley McCall

Program Discussion

Danny Miller, Principal
Dale McDonald, Principal
Donna Parris, CHHS Teacher

Parents

Haywood County Board of Education

Robin Black, Finance Comm. Chairperson
Michael Sorrells, Bldg and Grounds Comm.
Member

Lunch at the Education Center

Visit Central Haywood High School

December 20, 2006

The Committee held its final meeting and discussed the proposed recommendation and legislation. The Committee voted to adopt the final report.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION

FINDINGS:

At the October 24, 2006 meeting, Dr. June Atkinson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, told the Committee that the State Board of Education believes that all students should graduate from high school and be prepared for work or to pursue further education in order to compete globally in the 21st century economy. The State Superintendent is encouraging all LEA's, in the next 3 years, to meet an 85% high school graduation rate.

The State Board of Education and the State Superintendent support raising the compulsory school attendance age to 18. Dr. Atkinson added that raising the compulsory age alone will not fix the problem of high school dropouts but should be one of multiple strategies used to address the problem. Dr. Atkinson provided the following ideas for ways to make sure that students stay in school until they graduate:

- Address the ninth grade transition to high school by providing smaller learning communities
- Take full advantage of technology to keep students engaged in the learning process
- Continue to expand professional development opportunities so that teachers know how to teach to all children
- Provide a system of extra help and assistance for students who learn at different rates than other students
- Expand the school day beyond 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. to provide extra assistance
- Provide relevant and engaging instruction, including options for taking courses in career technical or vocational education and arts education
- Continue efforts to redesign high school

Also at this meeting, Mr. Eddie Davis, President of NCAE, provided his organization's ideas for ways to make sure that students stay in school until they graduate and to help students who have already dropped out:

- Implement early intervention programs to identify youths at-risk of dropping out and provide strategies for parents to assist their children
- Provide competent and caring teachers and administrators for every student
- Make high school graduation a priority for all students, including students who are incarcerated or have already dropped out
- Provide instruction using the most modern technology and provide technical/vocational skills for students not going to college

At the meetings in Charlotte and Clyde, NC, the Committee heard from school administrators, teachers, parents and students on the importance of small class sizes, caring teachers and other school personnel, and the importance of having alternative schools as methods for keeping students on track to graduation. At these meetings, the Committee also heard some of the pros and cons for raising the compulsory school attendance age. The Committee also heard about the necessity for additional

vocational/technical education classes for students who would be going straight to work after graduation.

Due to the short length of time that the Committee has been in existence, there was not adequate time to make a comprehensive examination of all the issues that it was charged to study. The Committee had also only begun traveling across the State to gather public input on the issues and to learn about successful programs. Therefore, the Committee makes the following recommendation:

RECOMMENDATION: CREATE A JOINT LEGISLATIVE STUDY COMMITTEE ON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND DROP OUT RATES.

The House Select Committee on High School Graduation and Drop Out Rates encourages the General Assembly to enact legislation to establish a Joint Legislative Study Committee to continue to examine ways to improve high school graduation rates, the need for increasing the compulsory school attendance age, and ways to ensure that all North Carolina citizens are prepared for the world of work or to succeed in higher education. ([See Legislative Proposal on Page 12.](#))

**LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2007**

H

D

HOUSE DRH30136-RJz-1 (12/06)

Short Title: Dropout Study.

(Public)

Sponsors: Representatives Parmon and Wright (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to:

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT TO IMPLEMENT A RECOMMENDATION OF THE HOUSE
SELECT STUDY COMMITTEE ON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND
DROPOUT RATES TO ESTABLISH THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE STUDY
COMMITTEE ON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND DROPOUT
RATES.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1.(a) There is created the Joint Legislative Study Committee on High School Graduation and Dropout Rates. The Committee shall consist of 16 members. The Speaker of the House of Representatives shall appoint eight members and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate shall appoint eight members.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives shall appoint a cochair, and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate shall appoint a cochair for the Committee. The Committee may meet at any time upon the joint call of the cochairs. Vacancies on the Committee shall be filled by the same appointing authority as made the initial appointment.

The Committee, while in the discharge of its official duties, may exercise all powers provided for under G.S. 120-19 and G.S. 120-19.1 through G.S. 120-19.4. The Committee may contract for professional, clerical, or consultant services as provided by G.S. 120-32.02.

Subject to the approval of the Legislative Services Commission, the Committee may meet in the Legislative Building or the Legislative Office Building. The Legislative Services Commission, through the Legislative Services Officer, shall assign professional staff to assist the Committee in its work. The House of Representatives' and the Senate's Supervisors of Clerks shall assign

clerical support staff to the Committee, and the expenses relating to the clerical employees shall be borne by the Committee. Members of the Committee shall receive subsistence and travel expenses at the rates set forth in G.S. 120-3.1, 138-5, or 138-6, as appropriate.

SECTION 1.(b) The Committee shall study the need to raise the compulsory school attendance age, methods for increasing the high school cohort graduation rate, and methods for lowering the dropout rate. In connection with this study, the Committee may consider and report on:

- (1) The impact of dropping out on the student;
- (2) The capacity of a 16-year-old to understand the social and economic consequences of dropping out of school;
- (3) The emergence of major high school reform efforts, including Learn and Earn Programs, the New Schools Initiative, and 21st Century Schools, and the impact they may have on teenagers who remain in school longer;
- (4) The importance to the entire State of every student leaving high school prepared to enter the workforce or succeed in higher education;
- (5) Research on factors related to students' success or lack of success in schools;
- (6) Strategies, programs, and support services that should be provided if the compulsory school attendance age is raised to enable students to graduate from high school, and time lines for implementing those strategies, programs, and support services;
- (7) Related laws and policies that must be addressed to ensure the availability of support services for students;
- (8) The fiscal impact of raising the compulsory attendance age;
- (9) Possible exemptions from the law for certain students; including those students who fulfill their graduation requirements early and receive a diploma, complete an alternative education program, or whose parents consent to their leaving school before they graduate or reach the maximum compulsory school attendance age;
- (10) The fiscal impact of raising the compulsory school attendance age on the Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Department of Correction;
- (11) The law in other states and the experience of other states that have raised the compulsory school attendance age;
- (12) Input from school personnel and from dropouts and students at risk of dropping out on the issue;
- (13) Any changes that are needed to the definition of a dropout and any changes in data collection to ensure consistency and accuracy in reporting the dropout rate;
- (14) Proven strategies and early intervention programs that can be implemented to prevent at-risk youth from dropping out, especially in the middle grades;

- (15) Data on the number and demographics of students who drop out before the 9th grade;
- (16) The importance of requiring every student to meet with a professional counselor for an exit interview to find out why students are dropping out; and
- (17) The importance of making sure that at-risk students are counseled about all of the support services, including alternative schools and extra assistance, that are available to help them meet their graduation requirements.

SECTION 1.(c) The Committee shall submit a report of its findings and recommendations, including any legislative recommendations, to the 2008 Regular Session of the 2007 General Assembly or to the 2009 General Assembly upon its convening. The Committee shall terminate on the convening of the 2009 General Assembly.

SECTION 1.(d) Of the funds appropriated to the General Assembly, the Legislative Services Commission shall allocate funds for the expenses of the Committee established by this section.

SECTION 2. This act is effective when it becomes law.

Appendix A

Summary of the Minutes from the Meetings in Charlotte and Haywood County

(A notebook containing the complete minutes for each meeting and all information presented to the Committee is filed in the Library in the Legislative Building.)

Thursday, November 2, 2006

6:30 P.M. / West Charlotte High School, Charlotte, North Carolina

Ann Clark, Assistant Superintendent, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools – Ms. Clark introduced herself as the regional superintendent of high schools in Charlotte. She said that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System has tried to create programs that foster choices among students and parents. The school system has also acknowledged that the comprehensive, traditional ninth to twelfth grade high schools are not models that work for many students, particularly those students in larger urban districts.

Ms. Clark reviewed several programs used by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System to help students stay in school and receive a high school diploma. The first initiative at Garinger High School is the creation of two small specialty high schools within the larger facility. Because ninth grade is the grade level where, traditionally, the largest number of students is lost in the transition to high school, both high schools opened classes with only a ninth grade. Ms. Clark explained that the committee would hear Garinger High School administrators, teachers, and parents give their observations about the initiative. The next initiative, the Performance Learning Center, is a small non-traditional, stand-alone high school that is a partnership between Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and Communities in Schools (CIS). Through this partnership, the Performance Learning Center (PLC) is considered a role model for successful dropout prevention programs. This model is implemented in nine Charlotte-Mecklenburg high schools and several middle and elementary schools. Ms. Clark also recognized the Bright Beginnings Program, a unique dropout prevention program, for four-year olds, which gears younger students towards a more successful path in their K-12 education.

On behalf of all the high school principals in Charlotte, Ms. Clark urged the committee to look at and carefully review how students are coded as dropouts for reports, particularly those students who go on to community colleges.

Garinger High School

Jo Ella Ferrell, Principal – Ms. Ferrell thanked the committee and welcomed them to Charlotte. To address the challenges of dropouts, Garinger High School has the services of a case manager to work with individual students. Ms. Ferrell introduced Ms. Carol Rodd and asked her to speak about some of the students that she has personally assisted.

Carol Rodd, School Social Worker/Case Manager – Ms. Rodd explained that her role was to provide intensive case management services. Specifically, she has a caseload of 50 students that are deemed “at-risk”. She gave an anecdotal account of two at-risk students

that she had worked with who have since found success. The first student was repeating ninth grade for the third time, had been abusing drugs, had been exposed to gang activity and crime and became pregnant. The student was referred to the Performance Learning Center where she has been successful in turning her life around.

Ms. Rodd described her work with another at-risk student who was an eighteen- year-old resident alien with mental illness. He became homeless when his family put him out on the street. Garinger High School's social services support team provided intensive case management services. He is now enrolled at Central Piedmont Community College and performing successfully.

Brian Freeland, Teacher - Mr. Freeland explained his role at Garinger High as both a teacher and a coach. He said it is good that the Committee is seriously considering raising the compulsory attendance age. According to Mr. Freeland, Garinger High School has a large population of Hispanic, African, Bosnian, and Croatian students that are not proficient English speakers. This situation creates a language barrier that is not being addressed. Raising the attendance age would give these students considerably more time to learn the language and therefore be able to meet the requirements of standardized testing in North Carolina. From an athletic perspective, raising the age requirement would give students further chances to grow and learn.

Mr. Freeland introduced Courtney Hoye, a senior and national honor society student at Garinger High School.

Courtney Hoye, Student – Ms. Hoye said that she is a participant of the Communities in Schools program (CIS) and the accelerated program at Garinger High School. CIS is beginning a volunteer tutoring program for ninth graders who need help with their academic work. Ms. Hoye felt that more parent involvement and participation would help students to remain in school. She also felt that it would help if more teachers could stay after school to assist students. She agreed that the language barrier makes it hard for some students to keep up.

International Studies School at Garinger High School

Natasha Thompson, Principal – Ms. Thompson said that her high school opened in August with an enrollment of eighty-five students. Of those students, ten were identified as “at- risk” because they had missed more than fifteen days of school in the eighth grade. Since their enrollment at Garinger High, these students have been present, engaged in learning, and have performed very well. She believed that the following three components and characteristics of the small school have contributed to their success.

First, a small school structure has more flexibility in scheduling, close interaction between students and faculty, and it provides an environment that allows teachers to plan together to create lessons that are relevant to the student. Second, the focus on international studies allows students to see the relevance of how their learning relates to global issues that impact their lives. Lastly, the small school is able to provide advising that promotes relationship building. Advising is available twice a week for 30 minutes and facilitated by a teacher who helps students with both academic strategies for success such as study habits and social skills such as value and character building traits.

Herman Gloster, Teacher – Mr. Gloster stated that he was excited about the possibility of raising the dropout requirement age from sixteen to eighteen, but challenged the committee to also raise the expectations of high school students. Mr. Gloster stated that among the various reasons that students drop out; perhaps the largest problem is that many students are not motivated to learn for their own good but because learning is expected of them by their teachers and parents. He believes that college should not be considered an option, but a necessity. He said that students need to overcome their own social stereotypes and change them by taking the steps to become successful. Lastly, he recommended that the committee ask students how to change the dropout rates.

LaPorsha Holt, Student – Ms. Holt, a freshman student, explained that she almost dropped out of school. She said that she had lost motivation because of a lack of support and poor performance in the classroom. Two of her siblings had already dropped out of school. However, her current year at the International School had given Ms. Holt much more motivation to become successful. Smaller classes and personal interaction with her teachers had motivated her to become a better person and student.

New Technology High School at Garinger High School

Barry Blair, Principal – Mr. Blair explained that his school, the New Technology High School, is the other small high school that opened on the Garinger campus earlier this year. Mr. Blair explained that at his high school, technology is used as a tool for improving instruction and student interest. Students focus on pursuing careers in the technology field. Each student has a computer and the curriculum is project-based learning.

Mr. Blair described several benefits of having a small school setting. First, the high school has a ‘family-like’ atmosphere, which welcomes students into a supportive environment. The small school setting also allows Garinger to involve the school social worker as well as all of the stakeholders in the community. The school also promotes hands-on experience, a technique that goes beyond reading and taking a test. Mr. Blair explained that this technique is particularly successful with young males who often need to learn kinesthetically; giving them the opportunity to move, using their hands and their minds as well.

Erica Luttschyn, Teacher – Erica Luttschyn, World History teacher, explained that the small class size and the project-based learning style allow the faculty to monitor the students more closely. She has a class size of eighteen students that allows her to closely monitor student attendance. Project-based learning requires students to work in groups. Ms. Luttschyn stated that the process establishes more responsibility and accountability among the students. The New Technology School is also unique in that it is web-based, meaning that a student’s progress and grades can be tracked online by both the students and their parents. Lastly, Ms. Luttschyn stressed that the New Technology School actively involves its parents and has strong relationships with them.

Basma Metwally, Student – Ms. Metwally said that the small environment helps students to get to classes faster, helps them to bond with teachers and build close relationships with one another. After school tutorials help students to improve their grades and parents are able to view student progress on the computer. She believes that these aspects of the small school help to decrease the dropout rates.

Omneya Metwally, Adult Sister to Basma representing her mother – Ms. Metwally began by stating that she graduated from Garinger High School last year and had thought about dropping out many times during her high school years. She found it hard to be motivated because she was bored and could not understand the purpose of her current studies. After graduation, Ms. Metwally understood that her education connected her to the outside world and regretted not paying more attention while in school. Her recommendation to the committee was to listen to the students. She explained that if you ask students what they are interested in and what they want to learn, then you will have more motivated students in school.

Paulina Amenityro, Student – Ms. Amenityro talked about the dropout and attendance rate and how the New Technology High School will decrease dropout rates. The school has seven teachers for ninety-six students. Ms. Amenityro stated that this small ratio gives teachers more one-on-one time with the students. Students need someone to talk to and if teachers do not have time to listen to their students then they drop out. She used an example of North Mecklenburg High School, one of the largest high schools in the system, with over 3600 students. Schools like this do not give enough time for teachers to listen to their students. Ms. Amenityro believes that the smaller classes at the New Technology High School will help increase the relationship between teachers and students and will decrease the dropout rate.

Performance Learning Center

Sherry Sigmon, Principal – Ms. Sigmon began with a short analogy in which she described a one-size fits all glove. She stated that the glove does not always fit and that that analogy can be applied to schools. Like the glove, Sigmon stated, many students do not fit in at their schools and drop out. She described the Performance Learning Center (PLC) and said that they got the idea from the state of Georgia. The Performance Learning Center, which partners with Communities in Schools, helps to provide nonacademic support for students who are having trouble at home. The school also believes in building relationships and being positive. Academically, the PLC charts student progress with individual education plans and gives frequent progress reports. Each student is allowed to move at his or her own pace via the computer. Also, the small family environment at the PLC has given students the ability to encourage each other to come to school and excel.

Debbie Delong, Teacher – Ms. Delong, a math teacher at the Performance Learning Center (PLC) said that many students at the PLC have come to the school with bad experiences such as poor self-esteem or high absenteeism in school. However, after coming to the PLC, they leave with positive feelings every day. Ms. Delong gave a short anecdote about a math student who had only been with the school for a few months, but is already excited about the prospect of attending college. Each student at the PLC has mentors and tutors. There are small classes with a maximum of fifteen students

Tasha Sherrill, Teacher – Ms. Sherrill, business education teacher, stated that the students have embraced the goals of the PLC and have grown academically. Students enjoy the smaller class size and are not afraid to share their opinions and questions. She stated that the school encourages support from peers and staff. The PLC is known as a non-threatening, loving family environment.

LaTasha Harris, Student – Ms. Harris explained that the school truly promotes a family atmosphere. Compared to her old school, the PLC provided much smaller class sizes and better interaction with the faculty. The school is geared towards helping students go to college. Ms. Harris stated that she previously had a high level of absenteeism, but that the overwhelming support and interaction with teachers had encouraged her to come to school everyday. Ms. Harris concluded by stating that the PLC has encouraged her to attend college.

Ms. Harris said that raising the dropout age to eighteen would motivate students to finish high school.

Matthew Brady, Student – Mr. Brady introduced himself as a senior student at the PLC. Mr. Brady described the PLC as a godsend, because it came at a time in his life when he needed motivation in school. During the previous year, in regular high school, he was distracted and had a lot of absences that led him to fail. At the PLC, he is currently taking thirteen classes and that will allow him to graduate on time with all of his friends back at his old high school. Mr. Brady stated that the staff at PLC looks at their students as family members which helps to motivate the students to succeed.

Mr. Brady stated that raising the dropout age requirement would give students two more years to grow and mature.

Principal Sherry Signmon stated that currently the school has eighty students and will be expanding to their capacity of 100 students. The school is a nontraditional school that teaches academics in a nontraditional way through computer-based instruction. Ms. Signmon stated that the PLC does not take any student that has not already been in the ninth grade at another high school because they first have to experience high school. The majority of the students at the PLC are repeaters, sometimes two and three year repeaters. The grade levels are nine through twelve.

Dr. Ricky Woods, Senior Minister, First Baptist Church -West, Charlotte, NC –

Dr. Woods explained that his church, First Baptist Church -West, has a fourteen- year - old volunteer tutorial program that began at Oaklawn Elementary School. The church is now moving forward with a new program that focuses on working with a number of elementary schools with high risk children. Dr. Woods explained that in 2003 the church formed a non-profit organization called First Baptist Church West Community Service Association to oversee their community-based operations. This process included the involvement of area principals, community residents, church members and parents to find out what kind of programs they needed to provide to insure the success of their children. Dr. Woods described the creation of another program in 2003, an after school and summer program that focuses on academics and fine arts. He recognized Ms. Patrice Thompson and Ms. Patsy Burkins who further described their programs.

Bobby Sutton, Associate Dean for Community Development, Central Piedmont Community College –

Mr. Sutton said that this department houses the basic skills programs which include GED and Adult High School. He stated that first and foremost they do not encourage anyone to drop out of school. He also felt that raising the dropout age from 16 to 18 would be a good idea. If that happens, Mr. Sutton requested the

committee to consider removing the driver license law that the community colleges have to monitor.

Mr. Sutton gave an overview of the program at Central Piedmont Community College. The GED program requires that students be functioning at a ninth grade reading and math level. A student can take a community college course at the age of 16 and must be authorized by the CMS school system. In contrast, the adult high school program requires students to be 18.

J.J. McKeyhern, Associate Dean of Enrollment and Student Services, Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) – Mr. McKeyhern began by stating that there is a strong relationship between Central Piedmont Community College and the Charlotte Mecklenburg School System. There are about twenty-five collaborative programs that he believes have impacted high school graduation and dropout rates. CPCC works extensively with concurrent enrollment, which allows students to enroll at CPCC and get college credit while still in high school. One other program, College Connection, is a program that speaks to high school English classes about career options, financial aid, and how to start the college enrollment process. Follow-up is provided in April and these students get to register for classes early.

The public speakers were as follows:

Ron Adams, Director of the Muhsin Muhammad Foundation – Mr. Adams said that of all the programs that were presented to reduce the dropout rate, there is a population of young people that are not being served. In the M2 Foundation For Kids, Mr. Adams stated that they had instituted several programs for young males including a math and English tutoring program, career development, and the PEP (Parent Empowerment Program). No student who has participated in the program has dropped out of high school. Mr. Adams introduced Isral Franks, a participant in the Muhsin Muhammad Foundation. He asked Mr. Franks to answer three questions for the committee: 1. Do you know anyone who has dropped out of high school in the last three years? 2. Why did they drop out? 3. What are some changes that can be made in the school to keep teen-agers in high school?

Isral Franks, Student, West Charlotte High School – Mr. Franks introduced himself as a junior at West Charlotte High School. He answered the first question by stating that two of his friends and his sister dropped out. Mr. Franks stated that his sister had a lot of personal problems and became disinterested in school. His friends dropped out because they became active in gang and drug activity. As for what could be changed in the school, he suggested that schools should have more one-on-one tutorials to personally help students with certain subjects. He also suggested that school rules should be enforced to stop students from engaging in bad behavior at schools.

Mr. Frank was asked his opinion of raising the dropout age. Mr. Franks stated that the committee should raise the age because it allows students to mature and realize the importance of high school.

Blanch Penn, West Charlotte Recreational Center – Ms. Penn stated that she is in contact with many young people at the recreation center and tries to keep them in school. She was concerned about suspensions and the dropout rate. Ms. Penn also stated that she

has had problems with her son who dropped out of high school. He was a former honor student and dropped out of high school in the 12th grade after he got involved with the wrong crowd. Ms. Penn stated that she encouraged her son, who enrolled and graduated at Central Piedmont Community College, to complete his high school degree. Ms. Penn emphasized the influence of peer pressure on children and particularly her experiences with her teen-age children. She stated that children need direction from the entire community.

Brother KoJo - Brother KoJo commended the speakers from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System for the work that they are doing. However, he worked in a school that was not doing well. He stated that even though the programs that were presented were doing well, there were also many schools and students that were struggling. He worried that there is a resurgence of racism in the United States. He was especially concerned about inner city schools that are predominately one race and where many low-performing students, students with low self-esteem, and low income students are in attendance. In these schools, teachers spend most of their time trying to control their class rather than teach those who want to learn. Brother KoJo stated that all children need to succeed and that schools need to accommodate students so that everyone can learn.

Brother KoJo said that the system needs to balance schools. Children do not need to be separated as far as education levels and income. Instead, Brother KoJo stated that if a struggling child was placed among children with positive attitudes, then the struggling child will emulate that positive behavior.

Brother KoJo agreed that the dropout age should be changed. However, the committee would need to look at stronger truancy laws that would force children to go to school. Other states, such as Florida, punish the parents for poor student attendance. If students know that their parents will go to jail if they do not attend school, then they will go to school.

Dr. Becka Tait, Pediatrician, Teen Health Connection – Dr. Tait introduced herself as a local pediatrician. She explained that medical research has found that during the years of adolescence, children’s brains are still growing and maturing. She strongly advises raising the compulsory age to eighteen for biological reasons.

Dr. Tait also asked the committee to make a strong truancy mandate. She described young adolescents whom she had observed that had already made up their mind to drop out long before they were sixteen. She stated that a stronger truancy program with punishments and rewards would motivate students to be successful.

Wednesday, December 13, 2006
10:00 A.M. / Haywood County Education Center, Clyde, North Carolina

Dr. Anne Garrett, Superintendent, Haywood County Schools - Dr. Garrett began by welcoming the delegation to Haywood County School's Education Center. She stated that representatives from our school system will share with you the dropout prevention and intervention programs that have proven to be very successful in Haywood County. Today you will be hearing from our teachers, parents, students, administrators and members of the board of education. Improving the education for all children is a very important goal for the Haywood County Schools.

In lieu of changing the dropout age, we will be recommending some very successful intervention strategies. These strategies are the result of recent high school reform efforts and we need to be allowed to continue these programs and monitor their progress.

Our topics will include: alternative high school, early college, and gateway recovery. Also, we will be sharing our concerns about changing the compulsory attendance age and making several recommendations.

At this time, I would like to address two very important issues regarding dropouts. In 1998-1999, the definition of a dropout changed significantly. Prior to this, students who left the public schools and attended a community college to obtain a GED or Adult High School diploma were not counted as dropouts. This change has made a very significant increase in the number of students who were counted as dropouts and our numbers peaked when this change was made. I recommend that for reporting purposes, the definition of a dropout should be that if a student leaves public school and successfully enrolls in an accredited program such as a community college, which offers a GED or diploma through the Adult High School program, then these students should not be counted as dropouts. For many students this is an attractive and proactive option that allows them to work during the traditional school day to help support their families while earning a high school diploma.

My second issue is the duplicated count used to report dropouts. We have been penalized because we believe in giving these 16 and 17 year olds another opportunity. Students who drop out of our high schools are counseled before leaving and then if they wish to return they are given that opportunity. The reporting needs to be changed because one student may be counted twice or even three times thus resulting in an inaccurate number. This change is an easy way to support the school systems as they work to recover dropouts – also, it's a more accurate count.

Dr. Bill Nolte, Associate Superintendent, Haywood County Schools - who gave an overview of the speakers who were to present and shared a couple of overriding themes for each one.

- *Phil Pressley, Principal of Central Haywood High School.* This is a very successful alternative high school because it is designed for students who are interested in earning a high school diploma. It is not an alternative to detention or long-term suspension or a place for people who have committed felonies.

- *Dr. Doris Hipps, Dean of the Haywood Early College.* This is a new program and affords students an opportunity to earn a high school diploma and a two-year college degree in a five-year period. We enrolled 56 freshmen this year and intend to add one class of freshmen each year for the next five years until we have a graduating class of students who have earned both a high school diploma and college degree. There are a number of obstacles that we have worked through to make this program work. One example of a challenge is that the high school calendar includes 180 instructional days while the community college calendar is 160 instructional days. There are other issues like that that you may be able to help us with.
- *Kyle Ledford, Manager of the WIA Gateway Recovery Youth Program* - We have had challenges. The high school databases don't accept college credit numbers; but we have been able to make that happen and the legislature may be able to open some other doors for us. We have over 20 students that were dropouts who are back in the adult high school and we hope they will graduate from Central Haywood High School either at the end of the first semester or at the end of the year.
- We have *two students Jason King and Ashley McCall* that will speak to you about their experiences.
- *Danny Miller, Principal of Pisgah High School, Dale McDonald, Principal of Tuscola High School and Donna Parris, CHHS Lead Teacher* will speak with you.
- Several board of education members will then speak with you. *Robin Black, the Board's Chairperson of Finance*, will have some ideas for you in terms of how financially things might be organized differently to support graduation rates.
- *Michael Sorrells* will speak about buildings and grounds as it relates to graduation rates.”

Dr. Nolte continued by requesting that the legislature focus on removing barriers rather than imposing more restrictions. A few ideas:

Allowing students to transfer to the community college in a legitimate high school graduation program or adult high school graduation program at a community college or university and not calling the student a dropout.

Making sharing courses between the community college and high schools more accessible. For example, if the Haywood County Schools offer a course at Tuscola High School, the community college cannot offer that course for us at another public high school. Our two traditional high schools are on different schedules. One's a seven period day- one's a block schedule, we like that. We ask that you would allow us to form local partnerships; school systems with neighboring colleges and universities and allow the college/university and the school system to determine the courses that are appropriate for graduation.

We would like to maintain the integrity of our alternative high school and that is one possible problem that we would have with the automatic change of the legal age for one to drop out from 16 to 18. Our alternative high school is a place where a student comes to complete their high school education and they are not burdened with someone sitting beside them who does not want to be there, who has a stream of criminal convictions or a long history of disruption.

Also, we are currently tied to seat time for credits. To maintain the quality of a particular credit in a course, students have to sit in that course for 135 hours. We would contend that there are a few students who would know enough about algebra or history or English to pass a competency (end-of-course) test without having to sit there all year long. So we ask for the Committee to take a look at that and allow us to move toward a credit basis that is based upon the student's competency rather than seat time.

Lastly, in North Carolina, we are looking at taking away the career diploma track. We are removing options for students and we here in Haywood County believe we need more options. Certainly we want to have the university track diplomas, the college tech prep diplomas, but we also know in the real world that every child is not going to get a four-year degree and be a banker or lawyer or school teacher. We would like for the legislature to consider us moving toward the diploma tracks that are skill-based and would provide students with skills and knowledge that would allow them to be employed in the future.

Phil Pressley, Principal of Central Haywood High School (CHHS) - Mr. Pressley began by sharing that the mission of Central Haywood High School is to prepare all students to earn a decent livelihood, to be good citizens of the nation and the world, and to make a good life.

Following is a summary of the key points of his presentation.

Goals for ABC & AYP

Increase the school's total composite score by 0.5%

Contact all parents/guardians at least 3 times during the school year

Introduce the students to a minimum of three community service organizations

The goals will be achieved by:

- (1) Posting the mission, vision and focus in all classrooms and hallways
- (2) Reaching the whole child and teaching the entire child
- (3) Teaching Respect & Responsibility

Shared Leadership with Staff and Administration Team

Share responsibilities and ownership of school; have weekly staff meetings to discuss and brainstorm ideas for the school, activities and student improvements or concerns

In October 2006, CHHS received the "Alternative School to Watch Award". It was one of two in the State to receive this recognition. Previously, the school had been named the #1 Alternative School in the State.

Culture & Climate

Innovated an incentive program for high achievement on EOC tests, maintaining good grades and good attendance

Hold individual recognitions for students each week to celebrate achievements

Provide fun activities for each three weeks of classes; including movies, games, socials, dancing, popcorn, snow cones, and drinks

Professional Development

Write grants and get money for staff development

Mentoring Program, including tag teaming with other high school teachers

Attend Superintendent's Roundtables and attend staff development workshops

Parent/Community Involvement

Teachers contact parents at least 3 times a semester

Hold a Thanksgiving Dinner for students, parents and Central Office staff

Faculty Ballgames

Recognize the Partners in Education Rotary Students of the month

Hold a prom

Curriculum & Instruction

Reduce credit requirements to 22 units

Fast track when possible to get students graduated

Use NOVA net as means of course recovery

Alternative scheduling – run a 5th & 6th period block

Let some students from other high schools take courses, after their regular school day is over, at the alternative high school in order to stay on track for graduation

Monitoring & Assessment

TPAI Evaluations of staff

EOC tests for students

VOCATS tests for students

Reward Systems: A Honor Role, A/B Honor Role, Perfect Attendance, PRIDE awards, letters to parents, calls to staff (Alert Now), Home visits

Mr. Pressley stated that there were 85 students enrolled. Enrollment is capped to keep the student/teacher ratio low. Mr. Pressley stated that there are 14 certified staff members. They do share some instructors with Haywood Community College that instruct a couple of classes. They also share a couple of instructors with Pisgah High School. The student/teacher ratio is between 1 to 10 and 1 to 8.

Mr. Pressley described how the students are selected to attend the school. He said that usually they are the students that will do better in a smaller setting. They may have fallen behind but they would probably have a better opportunity if they were in an alternative school setting. The decision is made by the principal of the respective high schools. During the intake process, the parents, the student, the alternative school principal, and a guidance counselor meet and discuss the expectations for students at the school, including the dress code. Then a sheet listing the goals that the student and parent would like to achieve is signed and held in a folder. Periodically the goals are reviewed during the year to see how the student is progressing.

Mr. Pressley was asked about the issue of the elimination of some technical vocational tracks. How is that addressed in the alternative school? Are you working with the community college? How is that handled?

Mr. Pressley stated that they are fortunate in that they have horticulture & animal science as a career pathway taught by an instructor on staff. They have criminal justice courses that they receive through the community college. They have a teacher on staff that teaches the business career pathway. They share and piggyback with the community college to achieve their career pathways.

Michael Sorrells, Haywood County School Board Member and member of the School & Grounds Committee - Mr. Sorrells stated that he wanted to address the need for additional resources if the dropout age is increased from 16 to 18. “Locally we have worked hard to implement several programs to decrease our number of dropouts. These efforts include Central Haywood High School, Haywood Early College and the Dropout Recovery Program. These efforts have resulted in a decrease in the number of dropouts. For example, two years ago we had 176 dropouts. Last year we decreased the number to 150. That is a 15% decrease in the number of dropouts.

Even with this significant improvement, we will need 8 additional classrooms and 8 additional teachers if the dropout age changes from 16 to 18. If you change the dropout age, please make sure that we have the funding to provide additional classrooms and teachers to give the students what they need.”

We are looking at some figures with the early college for some additional classrooms. Just for this county you’re looking at \$5-6 million dollars for the buildings and then the salaries and benefits for eight additional teachers.

Dr. Doris Hipps, Dean/Principal of Haywood Early College - Dr. Hipps stated that Haywood Early College is one of 30 early colleges located on community college campuses, across the State. Carolina. Haywood Early College is a partnership between Haywood Community College and the Haywood County Public Schools.

The school serves a population of students that are at-risk. The students at the Early College were selected by application. The criteria for admission is based on being successful in middle school, having no discipline record, having parents or guardians that have not been to college, and having a family income below \$60,000. These students are very sharp and have the ability to go to college but lack the support needed to complete high school and then go on to college.

The guidelines are based on a program of rigor, relationships and relevance. Research has proven that educational programs that are meaningful in student lives result in students being more likely to graduate from high school, and possibly going on to college. The school offers the support system that will afford the students the opportunity to complete high school and also an AA degree from Haywood Community College, or have 2 years of transferable credit to a 4-year college or university.

Dr. Hipps has 31 years of public school experience working in dropout prevention programs. She stated that she believes that many of the 16-18 year olds, if they are not successful in a traditional setting, be afforded the opportunity to enroll in a transfer

program to allow them to continue in an adult high school, without the stigma of being counted and labeled as a high school dropout.

The Early College Program allows each site to set the particular criteria that they think is appropriate and important for their particular community. Here at Haywood Early College our application process makes the students get a letter of recommendation from two people within their middle school program. We get a transcript of their grades. While the students may not be straight A students they have proven by State testing standards that they have a lot of ability. They come from homes with parents who did not complete a college degree and many of them did not complete a high school diploma. The students for the most part do not have a discipline file. They are well behaved and have an interest but really don't have the financial means to see a future in college.

Mr. Steve Williams, Student Services Director for the WIA [Workforce Investment Act] Gateway Recovery Program - He stated that in many cases the traditional schools have been unsuccessful in keeping a child from dropping out. Students drop out for a number of reasons. This program steps in when the schools have exhausted the opportunities to retain a student and keep them from actually dropping out.

The goals of the WIA Youth Program are to:

1. help students
2. address the dropout rate; reduce the number of dropouts for our school district
3. increase the number of students who graduate

“We were fortunate enough to sit down with the guidelines and parameters that we have to work within and come up with a way that we think is certainly making some headway in reducing the number of dropouts. Those students that have chosen to drop out of school after we have exhausted all other efforts to encourage them to stay in – what can we do with them that will impact not only our school system but impact those students? So Gateway Recovery is a referral process where students are referred from traditional high schools where they've dropped out. They are in dropout status when received into this program, but we feel that they have a great opportunity to come back in under the school system and actually graduate. And that's the goal of the program.”

Mr. Kyle Ledford, WIA Youth Program Manager - Mr. Ledford gave an overview of the WIA Gateway Recovery Program. Following is a summary of his comments.

The program is funded by a grant from the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and was implemented in June 2006. It is connected to the Haywood County JobLink Career Center.

The primary purpose of the program is to

- Identify local student dropouts
- Provide alternative learning opportunity leading to the completion of graduation requirements or re-entry to public school

The program is designed, implemented and operated in partnership with Haywood Community College Basic Skills / Adult High School program.

Course credit is awarded by Haywood Community College and accepted by the local board of education for credit leading to high school graduation.

Immediate Program Impact

- Increased graduation rate / 15 students graduated in December 2006
- Reduced local dropout events – 23 students have returned to public schools for reporting year 2005-2006

Mr. Ledford the outlined the program's process as follows:

Identification of students:

Systematic referral process

1. Local High School
2. JobLink System
3. Community College

Each student is assessed for their reading and math ability. Their transcripts are evaluated and their interests, aptitude, and values are assessed. Each student has an individual education /employment plan. We try to make the instruction relevant to the student's career goal. We have a reading and math competency requirement that students must meet before we allow them to go into the adult high school at the community college. Once in the adult high school, they get credits toward their high school graduation requirements. Every student is allowed to make application to come back into the public school system but they have to earn their way back into the public school by working hard, having good grades and good attendance. Students are exited from the Gateway Program by returning to public school if that is the best situation; graduation if that is the best situation; in some cases students want to go on to get a GED. The students that have come through the program have to complete more credits to get a high school diploma than they would to get an adult high school diploma. All except two students have asked to do the increased credits.

Student recruitment methods:

- Personal interview
- Telephone contact
- Written contact

Student assessment:

- Transcript evaluation
- Tab testing / pre and post
- Interest / aptitude / value assessments

Program Participation:

- Program orientation
- Individual education/employment plan
- Reading/math competency
- Entrance in to AHS
- Application of instructional/supportive services

Program Exit

Student application for readmission to public school for graduation

Student application for readmission to public school for completion of graduation requirements
Attainment of GED

The Gateway program allows services to be made available in the sequence which best accommodates the needs of the student. Also, by managing the delivery process, the services are made available at a much reduced cost and a much reduced incidence of duplication.

Mr. Ledford stated that kids drop out for many reasons. The ones that come to his program come because they have social problems, problems at home, or they have to work to support their families. They are pregnant teens and teenage offenders. "One of the things that we are very proud of is that 40% of the kids who leave high school go into remediation but less than 10% of ours have to."

The resources that are needed are small classrooms. The smaller the teacher/student ratio and the smaller the atmosphere, the better chance some students have at being successful. National statistics show that raising the dropout age to 18 is a good idea if you also apply a vast amount of resources behind the effort. I feel like we are a young program but we are really going to grow.

We are currently provided alternative classrooms on a Community College site that is funded through the WIA. At times we run about 30 kids through a GED instruction program and about the same through the WIA Gateway program.

Typically when a student comes to us who is reading below grade level we have reading specialists that we have hired through the college. The students are given intensive reading and math tutoring. They go to class daily only in those subjects where they are deficient and until they can be brought up to a level where they can be successful in the adult high school. Only when they reach those levels are they allowed to enter the adult high school. Some kids don't want to put forth the effort to enter the adult high school so they seek a GED. So we make that happen also. The statistics tell you that kids who leave our high schools stay in our area. These are the kids that are going to live here, pay taxes, fix our cars, and build our homes, etc. so we try to facilitate even a GED. We push 'the next level' for our kids. The GED is a ticket to the next level.

Steve Williams stated that it is important for everyone to understand the definition of a drop out in North Carolina because it's not the same in all states, including most states in the Southeast. "Right now we are reporting in North Carolina drop out data for the 05-06 school year. We've been working on this since the first of October. With all the requirements for properly reporting this it will probably be some time in late January or early February 2007 before all this is official. If a student drops out of school during the school year, and they do not re-enroll in a public school by the 20th day of the next school year, then they are counted as a drop out.

The Gateway Recovery Program kicks in for those students who have actually physically dropped out of school. The Gateway Program is not costing our school district anything at this point. We do have some additional money set aside to support the program if we need it. Once these kids drop out then the recovery process begins. A lot of kids have a difficult time in large settings. They do better in small settings. The intent is to try to

serve the students who have dropped out from our school district in the most appropriate way. Not every kid that drops out will be a candidate for the Gateway Recovery Program. It might be that the GED program or the adult high school is a better track for them. Or we may be able to help them with some sort of job training and they then decide to go to work. Those candidates that are identified as the students who would be likely to re-enter and have the credits and be on track to graduate then that's where Gateway Recovery steps in."

We are a place where a lot of the kids experience the only accountability they have in their life. When they buy into that, they do extremely well.

Ashley McCall, a student at Central Haywood High School - Ms. McCall testified that when she was in 10th grade she attended Pisgah High School. She quit school in the 10th grade then realized that that was not what she wanted. Since she was 11 years old she had wanted to be a nurse. When Ann Garrett told her about Central Haywood she was skittish about going at first because she had heard some really bad things, like "bad kids" being at the school but she decided to block that out. When she met with the school she found the teachers were great. The classes were smaller so that a student got more one-on-one instruction from the teachers. She also said that the top three reasons she felt that kids drop out of school are:

1. lack of parent encouragement and involvement
2. disabled students placed in large classrooms cannot be taught
3. troublemakers in the classroom prevent students that want to learn from learning

She stated the pros and cons on changing the dropout age. "Some of pros are: most kids would finish and have their high school diploma before they are able to drop out. Because I'm only 17, I graduate this year I wouldn't even be old enough to quit. Also regarding work-study programs; if they are not on the college-bound track, putting them in work places so they can realize 'Do I want to work in McDonald's or a small office – is that what I want.' Some of the cons, School would become a teenage day care, basically. Kids that don't want to be in school would rebel and be disruptive to the kids that want to learn. Fights and disruptive behavior would increase due to the fact that raising the age would make the kids that don't want to be there mad. If we do a disservice to our students by saying you can drop out at age 18, "Are we also giving them extra allowances by saying you can stay in school until you are 21?" If age 18 is going to be the minimum age, I think it should be the cut off age. You shouldn't be allowed to stay in school until you are 21. Central Haywood is a very good school. It has helped me in a lot of ways. If it wasn't for Central Haywood, I can honestly say that I wouldn't be graduating this year."

Ms. McCall introduced Jason King, a student at Central Haywood High School - He entered CHHS second semester of last year. He stated that he had made some bad decisions in the past and was unable to come back to Tuscola High School. When he first came to Central he didn't like it because it was not what he was used to. The longer he was there, he started making friends and getting to know the teachers. He really enjoys it now because you are not just a number in the school. This year he will be able to graduate this semester, earlier than he would have originally. He stated that he felt that it will not help anything if we move the dropout age to 18. It's just going to make kids that would have already dropped out stuck in a classroom against their will. They are not

going to learn. It will cost more money because if there are more kids in school that would have already been out then that means you will need more classrooms.

Danny Miller, Principal of Pisgah High - Mr. Miller said that there should be a single method to determine the dropout rate in the State. For example, the press release announcing this meeting stated that North Carolina's graduation rate is 66%, and then two sentences later it announced that North Carolina's annual drop-out rate is 4.7%. When we get our North Carolina ABC report card and our No Child Left Behind data we also get two different statistics for that. If we can identify one single way to do it, regardless what it is, we can make comparisons from year to year.

The second thing I would like to state is that in high school we are working in an every changing environment. I'm not talking just year to year but almost semester to semester. This is my sixth year as a high school principal and in the time that I have been there we have looked at graduation and exiting high school with the competency test. The competency test is first given in eighth grade and we continue to give it through high school. We did field testing for an exit exam and then never did use the exam. We now operate under courses of study or diploma tracks – there are four of those – which will determine what diploma a student will be given at the end. We have started exit criteria, which is very similar to the elementary/middle school gateways, where you must pass certain end-of-course tests to be promoted to the next grade. With that we are presently giving a US History test that is normed for 40% plus failure. Not success but failure. Just recently I read that consideration is being given to add new additional requirements to the core curriculum. This will include additional math classes and two foreign languages for every student. When we do that, we will have to sacrifice other courses. We are going to have to take children out of programs which are vocational, ROTC, and maybe physical education. I ask that we please choose a reform strategy that is researched-based and go with that strategy long enough to know if it is successful or not. And not the continual change.

Also I request that when we consider reform that we consider our special education students because these are the people who seem to get the short end of the stick. Those children want to feel successful and need to feel successful to be there. And if this is all about dropout prevention we need for you to consider those students. Dropout rate is not singularly a high school issue. I ask that you consider reform across the grades.

If we raise the dropout age to 18 we will have children there who don't want to be there and will be as disruptive as they can be. We have lots of alternatives for those students who need a smaller environment. I have talked with some of our students loosely about this and one of our boys pointed out the fact that "if I have to be here until I'm 18, what I'll do is bring a firearm to school or communicate a bomb threat so you will suspend me for 365 days and I won't have to be here anyway." That was a ninth grader who is not 16 yet, by the way. The last request that I have is that this will require us to deal with many high maintenance students. Please don't give us another unfunded mandate. If we deal with these children we desperately need the resources.

Dale McDonald, Principal of Tuscola High School - He stated that at Tuscola there are about 1,248 students and they are on a seven period traditional schedule. They do have classes that are blocked. They have chemistry & biology classes as well as vocational classes that are blocked. The majority of the school's classes are 50 minutes, seven

periods a day. This schedule works well for them. They have a tremendous arts program. With the new proposal to change the core curriculum, they are afraid that students will be limited in their choices. They are afraid that students will not be offered the opportunities in the vocational classes. They would like to be able to offer the vocational classes sooner to our students. Students have very few choices because of the class requirements they have to have. The majority of the reasons for dropouts at Tuscola High School are either attendance problems or credit problems.

Once students have reached the number of days absent when they cannot get anymore credit their options are limited. They cannot come back second semester and start afresh because the school is on a year long schedule. With other new DPI requirements planned to be implemented this will restrict students to only having required courses and prevent them from being able to have vocational classes and other electives.

Mr. McDonald stated that his counselors don't have time to work with students on drop out issues because they are stretched thin with dealing with attendance and high school credit problems. There are three full-time guidance counselors servicing 1,248 students. "They are doing everything from NCAA Clearinghouse to scholarships to pathways. They do a tremendous amount of work with SATs, with tests, cumulative folders, etc." One thing the counselors complain to him about is that students come in from the middle schools with many social problems. Their counselors don't have the time or resources to work individually or in small groups with the students on suicidal issues, peer-pressure issues, or other social issues. He stated that if we increase funding in those areas we could better deal with the drop out problems there. We could become more family oriented with the students to give them the encouragement and the pat on the back they need and deserve and to tell them that we understand what they are going through. While we do have outside resources the counselors just don't have the time to deal with the students as they should.

Nova Net has been a very successful program in Haywood County. They work closely with the Gateway Recovery Program. He gave an example. "A young lady, 12th grader, came to me back in September to say she was going to drop out. She just lacked three credits to graduation but was having problems with other female students and said she couldn't stay there, she was dropping out. We were able to direct that student to the Gateway Recovery Program. She came back the other day and stated that she has already finished her graduation requirements and will graduate and walk the stage at Tuscola High School in May. She will start at AB Tech Community College this coming January." They have a strict dress code and discipline code in his school, however he fears that some of the changes proposed may tie the hands of high school administrators.

Donna Parris, CHHS Lead Teacher - Ms. Parris stated that one thing does not work for every student. "We have to look at every child as an individual and how we can best serve every child. To say that every child must stay in school until age 18 will not solve the problem." For 33 years she has taught at every level, coaching, sponsoring clubs, offering all sorts of programs. She's been at Central Haywood High School for the past 13 years. She recommended that lawmakers look at strengthening the alternatives. Money can be better spent offering alternatives. She stated that increasing the age to 18 will hurt every teacher who has tried their best to keep that student there. Striving to do the make up work for when they are not in school, because their attendance is going to be low. Doing their OSS make up work, piles of work to send home that they may or may

not see; taking the teachers' special time from those kids who are there, who want to be there, who want an education. If that student is there and has not been suspended yet or is not staying at home hoping to get kicked out with bad attendance, then the teacher is dealing with the disruption in the classroom. She has a very bright student that has a block on taking tests and has failed the competency test four times. He is threatening to drop out. She also recommended reducing competency tests requirements. We need to keep kids in school and alleviate stressors. Don't force a higher age. It will add more problems to the lives of educators."

Ms. Parris stated that students need job skill training. "We need to let students have real life experiences. We have saved kids that have gone out and become productive citizens. That's our goal. I think we should go back to those kids hitting 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 and offer them some alternatives. Offer these kinds of extras and incentives and some job-skill training. Reduce some of these competencies in algebra and geometry and chemistry for the kids that are not going to go that track in life. Give us some leeway in our course offerings so we can give them some real life skills training and not be absorbed by having to meet all of these criteria and meet all of these tests so we can train these kids and give them some opportunities. We used to offer these things at Central Haywood but we can not longer do this because there are too many things to be met and too many tests to be taken and passed until our hands are tied. We can't take them to have some real life experiences like we used to be able to do. And that's hurt our progress. Giving them a chance to be in the community, giving some volunteer services, being on the jobs – doing a little bit of shadowing at the lower levels of school, instead of trying to meet all of the competencies, we could give them some reality checks earlier in life and you wouldn't have worry about what age they need to be before they can quit school. They'd want to be here and wouldn't want to drop out. And we would have them interested and engaged."

Robin Black, Finance Committee Chairperson for the Haywood County Board of Education - She proceeded to address three issues regarding drop out prevention. "The first item of importance is reducing the dropout rate by getting and retaining high quality teachers. Teachers have the single most important part in connecting with our students. Haywood County has increased local teacher supplements by .5% each year for the last 4 years in order to match other nearby systems. We have used the refund of sales tax for the last two years to fund the majority of this increase. This year we have not been able to budget this increase because of the removal of this revenue. We appreciate greatly the elimination of the discretionary cuts which provided an additional \$243,000 however by taking away the sales tax refund of \$167,000 we received a net increase of around \$76,000. Please consider reinstating the sales tax exemption for school systems similar to other local government and non-profit entities. While I dearly love NASCAR and am currently in NNROSD "No NASCAR Racing on Sunday Depression", schools across the State need this exemption from a fiscal stand point far worse.

The second item important in reducing the drop out rate is reducing class size and allowing teachers more time with each student. In order to reduce class size, you need more teachers and classrooms. Haywood County currently is funding 3 classroom additions with a recently passed bond. Two of these additions are at new elementary schools that are already short of rooms. In order to reduce class size we need to build more classrooms. With the additional lottery proceeds for school construction, we could accrue enough for classroom additions a one site in 7½ years. However, if the distribution

of these proceeds were based entirely on school enrollment, we would be able to build new classrooms much sooner. We believe the students west of I-70 are just as deserving as students east of I-70, and request equal funding. No school district in the Southern Appalachian Mountain Region of the State is scheduled to receive the additional funding based on tax rates while our percentage of people living in poverty is greater and the median household income lower than many wealthy receipt systems.

Ms. Black shared this story. “I have a unique perspective. I am the manager of our low-income public housing in Haywood County. I have 99 multi-family low-income units in 62 areas. I have fought to try to keep these kids in school. When I first started working there, I met a sixteen-year old girl who had dropped out of high school. She’s a smart kid with no discipline problem. I asked her to please go back to school or to get her GED, or go to Central Haywood – I pointed out many alternatives to her. I asked her, “don’t you want to get out of public housing.” She said, “The only way for me to get out of the projects is when I turn eighteen, to have a child and use a Section 8 voucher.” She’s nineteen now, and has two children. The State is providing all of her housing, all of her food, and all her medical care for a family of three. It is cheaper to provide alternative programs for these kids to help them become productive tax-payers in our State than to continue to provide for them in this way. We must break this cycle of poverty. The best way I’ve found to break the cycle is to get them back in school.

Parents were recognized in the following order: Judy Jones, Caroline Brown, Valerie Dyer and Debbie Inman. Each speaker gave reasons why they feel that raising the dropout age to 18 would be a mistake.

Judy Jones: “I am a parent and a retired school teacher. I’m here to represent the community, most importantly the students. I was lead teacher at Central Haywood High School before Ms. Parris.” She pointed out that the picture chosen by the students and CHHS to represent their school was a picture taken at graduation. “Rather than increase the age to 18, I feel the taxpayer money could be better spent funding alternative programs.”

Valerie Guyer: “I am the media coordinator at CHHS and a parent. As a parent of a student in Haywood County, I feel like if you raise the age to 18, the majority of those students are the ones that are causing problems. I don’t want that to interfere with my child’s education.”

Caroline Brown: “My daughter graduated from Pisgah High School two years ago. If at that time the dropout age had been eighteen, I would have been very disturbed because I would have known that her educational environment would have been interrupted. As a teacher I know how kids are when they don’t want to be in school. They can be dangerous to the environment and very disruptive and that’s not fair to the students who want to be there.”

Debbie Inman: I have two children who are still in school, one at Pisgah and one at Camp Middle. I’m trying to get my son in CHHS but there is no room. He is eighteen and he already wants to quit. He’s in the eleventh grade. Can we have more funds for Central Haywood? I wish there was more funding for programs to help students like my son stay in school and get what they need to graduate. He works for the school system after school, but he’s willing to go to Central after school to get his credits. He keeps failing

the tests they give, but he can do the work on the computer. He has a learning disability. He can read but he doesn't understand what he reads. If you can read it to him, he understands it. If you put it on a computer – he's got it. He would be a great computer programmer. He can comprehend from the computer but not if it's on paper. If the teachers had not worked with him he would have dropped out at sixteen. There are many students who just need a little extra help, but without the funding for these resources we are losing them.

Sue Ann Lindford, Cherokee County Schools - She stated there is a need for a comprehensive approach to addressing the dropout issue. We need to begin at the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades. We have a program in Cherokee County that is working to identify students in the early grades who are at-risk of dropping out of school. A team consisting of a nurse, a social worker and a counselor are working to help those students with their problems.

"Another problem is that 60% of our job applicants could not pass a drug test to be employed. It doesn't matter how many jobs we recruit in an area, if 60% of our people cannot pass a drug screen [and it's not just Cherokee county, it's the whole western part of the State,] then what value is it going to be to recruit jobs. Of the 40% of those that can be hired, 5% of them, six months later are the only ones still on the job. That's an attendance issue. Those habits are learned early.

There needs to be parent involvement and some type of punishment for parents that don't keep their children in school. This needs to be looked at in a very comprehensive manner. We have to look at it at the early age, we have to intervene in the middle school years, and we have to provide alternatives like the alternative schools and other programs in the later years. I encourage you to look at this very comprehensively beginning in the early years, because it is not just a high school problem."

Appendix B

James B. Black
Speaker



Office of the Speaker
North Carolina House of Representatives
Raleigh, North Carolina 27601-1096

HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND DROP OUT RATES

TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE NORTH CAROLINA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Section 1. The House Select Committee on High School Graduation and Drop Out Rates (hereinafter "Select Committee") is established by the Speaker of the House of Representatives pursuant to G.S. 120-19.6 and Rule 26(a) of the Rules of the House of Representatives of the 2005 General Assembly.

Section 2. The Select Committee shall be composed of the eighteen members listed below and appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Representative Earline Parmon, Co-Chair
Representative Thomas Wright, Co-Chair
Representative Bernard Allen
Representative Larry Bell
Representative Jean Farmer-Butterfield
Representative Susan Fisher
Representative Rick Glazier
Representative Maggie Jeffus
Representative Ed Jones
Representative Mary McAllister
Representative Marian McLawhorn
Representative Louis Pate
Representative Ray Rapp
Representative Joe Tolson
Representative Tracy Walker
Representative Edith Warren
Representative Jennifer Weiss
Representative Laura Wiley

Section 3. The Select Committee shall study the need to raise the compulsory school attendance age. In connection with this study, the Committee may study:

1. The impact of dropping out on the student.

2. The capacity of a 16-year-old to understand the social and economic consequences of dropping out of school.
3. The emergence of major high school reform efforts, including Learn and Earn Programs, the New Schools Initiative, and 21st Century Schools, and the impact they may have on teenagers who remain in school longer.
4. The importance to the entire State of every student leaving high school prepared to enter the workforce or succeed in higher education.
5. Research on factors related to students' success in school.
6. Strategies, programs, and support services that should be provided if the compulsory school attendance age is raised to enable students to graduate from high school, and time lines for implementing those strategies, programs, and support services.
7. Related laws and policies that must be addressed to ensure the availability of support services for students.
8. The fiscal impact of raising the compulsory attendance age.
9. Possible exemptions from the law for certain students, including those students who fulfill their graduation requirements early and receive a diploma, complete an alternative education program, or whose parents consent to their leaving school before they graduate or reach the maximum compulsory school attendance age.
10. The fiscal impact on the Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Department of Correction.
11. The law in other states and the experience of other states that have raised the compulsory school attendance age.
12. Input on the issue from school personnel, dropouts, and students at risk of dropping out.

Section 4. The Select Committee shall meet upon the call of its Chair. A quorum of the Select Committee shall be a majority of its members, including the Chair.

Section 5. Members of the Select Committee shall receive per diem, subsistence, and travel allowance as provided in G.S. 120-3.1. The expenses of the Select Committee including per diem, subsistence, travel allowances for Select Committee members, and contracts for professional or consultant services shall be paid upon the written approval of the Speaker of the House of Representatives pursuant to G.S. 120-32.02(c) and G.S. 120-35 from funds available to the House of Representatives for its operations. Individual expenses of \$5,000 or less, including per diem, travel, and subsistence expenses of members of the Select Committee, and clerical expenses shall be paid upon the authorization of the Chair of the Select Committee. Individual expenses in excess of \$5,000 shall be paid upon the written approval of the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Section 6. The members of the Select Committee serve at the pleasure of the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The Speaker of the House of Representatives shall fill vacancies and may dissolve the Select Committee at any time.

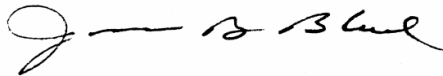
Section 7. The Legislative Services Officer shall assign professional and clerical staff to assist the Select Committee in its work. The Director of Legislative Assistants of the House of Representatives shall assign clerical support staff to the Select Committee.

Section 8. The Select Committee, while in the discharge of its official duties, may exercise all powers provided for under G.S. 120-19 and Article 5A of Chapter 120 of the General Statutes. The Select Committee may contract for professional, clerical, or consultant services as provided by G.S. 120-32.02.

Section 9. The Select Committee may meet at various locations around the State in order to promote greater public participation in its deliberations. The Legislative Services Commission shall grant adequate meeting space to the Select Committee in the State Legislative Building or the Legislative Office Building.

Section 10. The Select Committee may submit a final report on the results of its study, including any proposed legislation, to the members of the House of Representatives, on or before December 31, 2006, by filing a copy of the report with the Office of the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Legislative Library. The Select Committee shall terminate on December 31, 2006, or upon the filing of its final report, whichever occurs first.

Effective this 28th day of September, 2006.



James B. Black
Speaker

Appendix C

Nation's Educators Sound the Alarm on School Dropout Crisis

NEA's Plan for Reducing School Dropouts

NEA and its 3.2 million members believe every child in America should attend a great public school. It is a basic right of every American. The mission of NEA is to unite our members and the nation to fulfill the promise of public education that prepares every student to succeed in a global society.

We also believe that providing great public schools for every child is the shared responsibility of NEA and its 3.2 million members/educators, as well as parents, families, communities, businesses, and government at the national, state, and local levels.

NEA has developed 12 action steps to address the nation's school dropout crisis. While there are many ways to address this problem, NEA has chosen steps that are the most promising based on a wide range of experience and data.

NEA's 12 Dropout Action Steps:

1. **Mandate high school graduation or equivalency as compulsory for everyone below the age of 21.** Just as we established compulsory attendance to the age of 16 or 17 in the beginning of the 20th century, it is appropriate and critical to eradicate the idea of "dropping out" before achieving a diploma. To compete in the 21st century, all of our citizens, at minimum, need a high school education.
2. **Establish high school graduation centers for students 19-21 years old** to provide specialized instruction and counseling to all students in this older age group who would be more effectively addressed in classes apart from younger students.
3. **Make sure students receive individual attention** in safe schools, in smaller learning communities within large schools, in small classes (18 or fewer students), and in programs during the summer, weekends, and before and after school that provide tutoring and build on what students learn during the school day.
4. **Expand students' graduation options** through creative partnerships with community colleges in career and technical fields and with alternative schools so that students have another way to earn a high school diploma. For students who are incarcerated, tie their release to high school graduation at the end of their sentences.
5. **Increase career education and workforce readiness programs in schools** so that students see the connection between school and careers after graduation. To ensure that students have the skills they need for these careers, integrate 21st century skills into the curriculum and provide all students with access to 21st century technology.

6. **Act early so students do *not* drop out** with high-quality, universal preschool and full-day kindergarten; strong elementary programs that ensure students are doing grade-level work when they enter middle school; and middle school programs that address causes of dropping out that appear in these grades and ensure that students have access to algebra, science, and other courses that serve as the foundation for success in high school and beyond.
7. **Involve families in students' learning at school and at home** in new and creative ways so that all families-single-parent families, families in poverty, and families in minority communities-can support their children's academic achievement, help their children engage in healthy behaviors, and stay actively involved in their children's education from preschool through high school graduation.
8. **Monitor students' academic progress in school** through a variety of measures during the school year that provide a full picture of students' learning and help teachers make sure students do not fall behind academically.
9. **Monitor, accurately report, and work to reduce dropout rates** by gathering accurate data for key student groups (such as racial, ethnic, and economic), establishing benchmarks in each state for eliminating dropouts, and adopting the standardized reporting method developed by the National Governors Association.
10. **Involve the entire community in dropout prevention** through family-friendly policies that provide release time for employees to attend parent-teacher conferences; work schedules for high school students that enable them to attend classes on time and be ready to learn; "adopt a school" programs that encourage volunteerism and community-led projects in school; and community-based, real-world learning experiences for students.
11. **Make sure educators have the training and resources they need to prevent students from dropping out** including professional development focused on the needs of diverse students and students who are at risk of dropping out; up-to-date textbooks and materials, computers, and information technology; and safe modern schools.
12. **Make high school graduation a federal priority** by calling on Congress and the president to invest \$10 billion over the next 10 years to support dropout prevention programs and states who make high school graduation compulsory.

Appendix D

Cohort Graduation Rate

The rate for a school will be calculated as follows:

Students who graduated with a diploma prior to June 30, 2006
(and are included below)

Students in the school in the 9th grade in 2002-03*
Plus students who transferred into the school in the grade
appropriate to the cohort**
Minus students who transferred out of the school and
students who are deceased***

The rate for an LEA will be calculated as follows:

Students who graduated with a diploma prior to June 30, 2006
(and are included below)

Students in the LEA in the 9th grade in 2002-03*
Plus students who transferred into the LEA in the grade
appropriate to the cohort**
Minus students who transferred out of the LEA
and students who are deceased***

The rate for the state will be calculated as follows:

Students who have graduated with a diploma prior to June 30, 2006
(and are included below)

Students in the state in the 9th grade in 2002-03*
Plus students who transferred into the state in the grade
appropriate to the cohort**
Minus students who transferred out of the state
and students who are deceased***

Notes:

* Only includes those students who are in the 9th grade for the first time.

** Students who were in 8th grade in 2001-02 and transfer in as a
9th grader in 2002-03
10th grader in 2003-04
11th grader in 2004-05
12th graders in 2005-06

*** Students who transfer out are those who have not been reported as having
dropped out and the school has received a records request from an educational institution,
public or private in North Carolina or another state.

**Dropout students count as non-graduates unless they enroll in another school on
track at some point.**

The state rate is not the average of the LEA or school rates.