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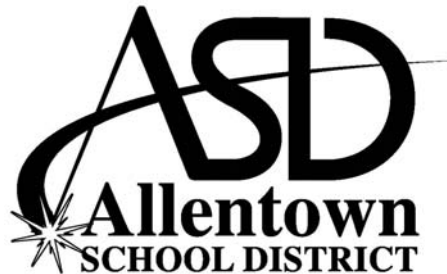
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2004-2005 ASD DROPOUT RATE DROPS 2.3 PERCENTAGE POINTS IN ONE YEAR TO NEW LOW OF 8.5 PERCENT

(Allentown, PA, December 1, 2005) – Allentown School District reports a high school dropout rate for 2004-2005 at 8.5 percent for grades 9-12, a decrease of 2.3 percentage points over the previous year. A dropout is defined as *a student who, for any reason other than death, leaves school before graduation without transferring to either another school or an adult education program.* Allentown School District records indicate 452 students dropped out within the 2004-2005 school year as opposed to 548 in 2003-2004 at a time when high school enrollments have grown 4.8 percent, from 5,096 in 2003-2004 to a total of 5,342 in 2004-2005 at both high schools.

Overall ASD Dropout Rate

	District 2002-2003	District 2003-2004	District 2004-2005
% Dropouts	10.4%	10.8%	8.5%
# Dropouts	513	548	452

“This new statistic is a very welcome sign that our concentration on this problem as a community is beginning to see some positive results,” stated Dr. Karen S. Angello, Superintendent. “During this past year, we initiated a more formal effort to harness our community resources to tackle the dropout problems and reduce the rate. This shared leadership apparently is making inroads. Examples of such leadership and support are evident in programs such as the Weed and Seed Program, Communities In Schools, the Lehigh County Conference of Churches Aspires mentoring program, Boys & Girls Clubs, Casa Guadalupe, Boy & Girls Scout programs and the many other after-school tutoring or activity programs offered by the District and the city. Youth development is important to the City of Allentown, as the success of our youth directly influences the safety and vitality of the city.”

Three-Year Comparison of Reasons for Dropping Out Indicated on Dropout Surveys

	2002- 2003	2003- 2004	2004- 2005
Wanted to work	14.2%	9.3%	11.7%
<i>Other (This category includes students for whom a survey could not be completed due to whereabouts unknown, and students who may have entered another school district but for whom we have no verification.)</i>	49.5%	38.9%	52.2%
Disliked school	12.1%	19.7%	23.2%
Academic problems	16.8%	17.9%	7.1%
Child, married, or pregnancy	3.7%	8.2%	1.3%
Runaway or expelled	1.2%	2.9%	2.4%
Behavior problems	2.5%	3.1%	2.0%

Note: Dropouts self-report the reason why they dropped out according to categories defined by the state.

When reviewing the 2004-2005 statistics, Susan Lozada, Director of Community and Student Services, stated, “Many factors contribute to students dropping out, and even though we attempt to find every student who leaves, it is becoming increasingly difficult to locate this highly mobile population, to know where they have gone. Almost half of the time, our students vanish with no word as to their next steps in life. We are committed to helping these children; every student is important to us.” Other reasons for dropping out include: continued academic failure, history of behavioral/discipline problems, unable to succeed in a climate of increased academic expectations, lack of proficiency in English, exhibiting patterns of truancy and adverse influences within the community. “We are trying to get beyond the talk to address the barriers to learning for students who are at risk of dropping out, and to help them understand the importance of an education.” Lozada further emphasized.

The racial and ethnic composition of the 2004-2005 dropout student population and changes since 2002-2003 is reflected as follows:

Three-Year Comparison of the Racial/Ethnic Composition of the Dropout Population

	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
Hispanic	62.6%	62.0%	61.5%
White (Non-Hispanic)	19.5%	20.4%	19.2%
Black (Non-Hispanic)	16.2%	16.8%	17.7%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.6%	0.4%	1.5%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.2%	0.4%	0.0%

Note: The percentage for each student population represents the portion of the TOTAL dropouts that are represented by that student population.

- The percentage of dropouts who are Hispanic reflects a slight **decrease** over three years.
- The percentage of dropouts who are White (Non-Hispanic) reflects approximately the **same** percentage over three years.
- The percentage of dropouts who are Black (Non-Hispanic) reflects a slight **increase** consistent with the increase in the percentage of Black students in the district.

A three-year comparison reflecting actual percentage of students that dropped out is noted in the table below. This table provides a clearer picture of the actual number of

students in each of the student populations. In addition, the data reflect the percentage of students within each student population that dropped out.

Three-Year Comparison of Dropout as a Percentage of Each Racial/Ethnic Group

Racial/Ethnic Category	District 2002-2003	District 2003-2004**	District 2004-2005		
	% of Dropouts	% of Dropouts	Total Enrolled	# of Dropouts	% of Dropouts
Hispanic	14.3%	14.0%	2,904	278	9.6%
White (Non-Hispanic)	5.3%	6.2%	1,618	87	5.4%
Black (Non-Hispanic)	12.0%	12.1%	985	80	8.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	7.4%	2.2%	102	7	6.7%
American Indian/Alaskan Native*	--	--	7	0	--
Total	10.4%	10.8%	5,616	452	8.5%

**Total number of students is too low for an accurate percentage.*

***Adjusted from original report in 2003-2004*

Dropout Reduction: Community Efforts

On April 1, 2004, Allentown School District’s Education-Committee-of-the-Whole conducted a small focus group and forum to discuss the dropout problem. Dr. Angello served as moderator to a panel of community representatives. With a focus on reasons for why students both drop out and remain in school, possible solutions for helping students stay in school emerged. Seeking direction on how ASD and the community could work together to keep students in school, a more extensive Dropout Forum was presented on June 22, 2005, at the Crowne Plaza, Allentown, with over 155 local representatives from education, government, welfare, law enforcement and non-profit agencies. The group met for one-day to continue the dialogue and develop plans for a community-wide reduction effort. National educator and author, Jay Smink, Ph.D., led the forum entitled, “Keeping Students in School: A Community Challenge.” Safety net programs were identified through a collaborative community-district approach at the forum, utilizing an analytical process to prioritize problems and solutions. The breakout sessions held after Dr. Smink’s presentation were the first step in building a long-term community action plan for change.

“Extensive community engagement must continue, as adverse influences in the community upon students must be addressed mutually with law enforcement, community agencies, parents and churches,” says Dr. Angello. “We are pressing on with more emphasis for increased reductions in the dropout rate, which is a true predictor of student success at ASD.”

Dropout Reduction: Districtwide Efforts

While it is important for the ASD administration to stay focused on why students drop out for reporting purposes, it is also important to expand school programs that can help prevent dropouts from indeed leaving school. Here are some of the current efforts underway at the middle and high school levels.

- **ASD alternative programs** such as ADVANCE, Communities In Schools, VISTA, Elect, Second Chance are options for certain students who have unique requirements to manage education.
- **Extended day** implemented, giving students additional opportunity to master the required standards in the core content areas.
- A \$39,000 **Successful Student Partnership Grant** (each of three years) has been provided by the PA Department of Education in 2005 for tutoring and mentoring support to prevent targeted students from dropping out.
- The ASD **summer programs** continue to expand to assist more students in reaching grade level expectations.
- The implementation of **grade nine teams** during the 2003-2004 school year is being monitored for its impact upon the success of students. Teams were extended into grade ten in the 2004-2005 school year.
- Communication has been strengthened between ASD and the **Weed and Seed** program.
- The ASD middle and high school reform teams – originally created to address systemic issues related to student success such as inclusion, raising expectations and quality in all curricular areas, differentiated instruction and adolescent literacy – have evolved to participate in the **Commonwealth’s Project 720 three-**

year grant, which will ensure that every student graduate ready for college. The grants, worth \$141,000 for ASD for each of three years, were distributed to 67 out of school districts in the Commonwealth for 2005-2006. Project 720 is PDE's program to address high school reform statewide.

- **Casa Guadalupe mentoring programs** at Dieruff High School have been introduced for ninth grade female students.

The Verification Process

The dropout verification process mandated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania requires districts to verify that a student has indeed moved on and officially enrolled in another school district. "When students move out of the District, especially to another state or country, this verification is often not forthcoming," says Daubert. "In the past, we primarily relied upon parents to verify the transfer, but that practice has become an unreliable source. Now, verification must come from the next district in which the student enrolls." With over 50% of students notated with 'whereabouts unknown', ASD staff has little it can do to identify more specific reasons why these students drop out. A more formalized process for monitoring the dropout problem with structured exit interviews with dropouts is used when students can be identified. Uniform procedures for counseling students who are at risk of dropping out are being implemented as well.

ASD Background

Serving approximately 18,100 students in 22 early childhood, elementary, middle and high schools located throughout the City of Allentown, PA, Allentown School District is the fourth largest school district out of 501 Commonwealth districts. About 73 percent of the students are members of minority groups. Sixty-nine percent of all students qualified for free or reduced lunch in 2004-2005. 16.9 percent of students today have limited English proficiency (LEP) and are enrolled in ESOL programs; 22.6 percent of the LEP students are in elementary schools. One in four students changes school locations throughout the year. The District continues to implement a standardized, district-wide instructional calendar with consistent teaching practices from school to school to assist students who move within and without the District on a frequent basis.

Allentown School District employs approximately 1,218 teachers and 2,000 employees overall. 484-765-4000 www.allentownsd.org

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