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Allentown Reengagement Center: Drop Out? Drop Back In

Every time a student drops out of school in the Lehigh Valley the cost is approximately \$700 a year. Last year more than 350 students dropped out of the Allentown School District (ASD). The Lehigh Valley Workforce Development Board, Inc. (LVWDB) is very concerned because this number impacts our current and future workforce. The cost of dropping out is high and every student is important to the growth of our economy.

New pathways need to be developed, therefore ASD, Communities in Schools of the Lehigh Valley (CIS) and LVWDB began a collaborative effort to offer alternative pathways for ASD. This effort resulted in The Allentown Reengagement Center (REC) that works to identify, engage and re-enroll disengaged youth back into the school district to earn an ASD diploma, therefore increasing their entry into Lehigh Valley's workforce.

CIS, part of a nationwide organization focused on dropout prevention, providing outreach and recruitment, knocking on doors and developing one-on-one relationships giving them a second chance and motivating them to re-engage back into school. CIS assesses the students' academic needs and guides them into an ASD facilitated online learning program or a GED program offered in cooperation with The Literacy Center. Once the youth re-engage in the center, located at 4th and Allen, the LVWDB, through CareerFORCE, assists with career awareness, exploration and development, provides national industry recognized certifications, post-secondary training opportunities and develops connections to employers through field trips, work experiences and ultimately employment.

Jonathan Fenner, Program Manager at Allentown REC, sums up the re-entry strategy by stating "Allentown REC was designed to help remove barriers and bring students who have left school back into an educational setting so they can earn their diploma or GED while also participating in a career readiness program."

In the five months since it opened, Allentown REC has contacted over 500 youth with 92 returning to an academic setting. If you have an interest in providing opportunities for disconnected youth, please contact Cindy Evans, Director of Youth Initiatives, LVWDB at 610-841-1004 or cevans@lvwib.org. We need your help in providing workshops, company tours, mentoring and employment opportunities. We need your support.