

Beauregard Parish a state leader for lowest dropout rate

The Louisiana Department of Education has released four years of data on state dropout rates which show Beauregard Parish in the top ten parishes each of the four years for the lowest percentage of dropouts, according to Director of Curriculum Karen Cunningham.

“Over the past four years, Beauregard Parish has reduced its dropout rate each year and has ranked in the top ten parishes with the lowest percent of dropouts,” Cunningham explained.

In 2005, Beauregard Parish had a 2.21 percent dropout rate, the seventh lowest in the state. By 2008, Beauregard Parish had a 0.93 percent dropout rate, the third lowest in the state.

Many factors contribute to the decrease in the dropout rate in the parish, said Cunningham, including an emphasis on High School Redesign, providing credit recovery options, promoting certification courses, creating the Beauregard Career Center with skills certifications, and implementing the Positive Behavior Support program.

Partnership with the Beauregard District Attorney’s office also assists by providing supportive programs like Families in Need of Services (FINS) and Truancy Assessment Service Center (TASC) which see that families receive attention and encouragement to help students remain in school.

In Louisiana, approximately 15,000 students in grades 7-12 drop out of school each year. Poor attendance, low or failing grades, and disciplinary problems are indicators for those students who are at-risk of dropping out. National data reveals that the number one reason students drop out is that they do not see the value of high school courses.

“In Beauregard Parish, we have focused on a number of programs to combat student dropout rates and seek to address the needs of at-risk students,” said Cunningham.

“Our Pharmacy Technician course is one example,” she explained. “High school students can enroll in the course which prepares them to successfully complete the Pharmacy Board Test and become eligible to work as a Pharmacy Technician and become licensed in that field.”

Other courses which lead to Industry Based Certifications include Microsoft Office Series (MOS), IC-3 (Computing Fundamentals, Key Applications, and Living Online), Outdoor Power Equipment Technology (OPET), ServeSafe, and OSHA10.

“Students can walk out of these courses with real-world credentials that often give them an advantage in the hiring process,” she said.

Beauregard Parish has implemented a Credit Recovery summer school option through the Louisiana Virtual School (LVS). Students can enroll in one of eighteen full-credit courses or six half-credit courses to earn new credit or recover credit formerly not earned toward graduation.

Students in all Beauregard Parish high schools also have the opportunity to take dual-enrollment courses with McNeese and area technical colleges which give them Carnegie units toward high school graduation while at the same time allowing them to earn technical college or university credit toward a degree while still in high school.

Articulation agreements with Lamar Salter Technical College, Sowela Technical Community College, and Sabine Valley Technical College provide students the opportunity to earn credit in dozens of course, and the STEPS program at Sowela can lead to Associate Degrees in 20 fields, including welding, culinary arts, and computer technology.

The Beauregard Career Center offers students an avenue for achieving academically while at the same time preparing them with real-world skills in specific occupations. Twenty skills certifications are currently available in such area as plumber's helper, child care helper, office assistant, and imprint machine specialist.

"By focusing on the needs of at-risk students, we are able to help students avoid or lessen the impact of those factors which contribute to the decision to drop out of school," Cunningham said.

"By clearly connecting high school learning with future career needs and interests of the students through dual enrollment and certification courses, we are meeting a real need while at the same time encouraging students to stay in school and on track for high school graduation," she concluded.