

Beauregard ranked second for lowest dropout rate

The Louisiana Department of Education has released the latest data on state dropout rates that shows Beauregard Parish has the second lowest percentage of dropouts among the 64 parish school districts in the state, according to Assistant Superintendent Karen Cunningham.

Beauregard's dropout rate is 0.21 percent, showing a continued decrease over the six years the state has been tracking this data.

"Not only does Beauregard Parish have the second lowest percentage of dropouts among the 64 parish school districts, but we are one of only five parishes to have a rate below 1 percent," Cunningham explained.

The State Department of Education began issuing dropout rate data in 2005. At that time, Beauregard was number seven in the state. The parish has lowered its dropout rate each year since the initial data and has remained in the top ten each of the five years.

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.

Many factors contribute to the decrease in the dropout rate in the parish, said Cunningham, including an emphasis on College and Career Readiness, providing credit recovery options, promoting certification courses, and creating the Beauregard Career Center with skills certifications.

Additionally, a 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.

Beauregard Parish schools are participating in the state initiative called Response to Intervention (RTI). This three-tiered intervention process is designed to move students to success in English language-arts and mathematics by identifying students who are academically at-risk and intervening to help them reach grade-level expectations. This program works in conjunction with the Positive Behavior and Intervention Support (PBIS) program which targets students who are at-risk for behavior issues.

"Both the RTI and PBIS programs target major issues related to dropout, namely focusing on helping students succeed academically and reducing disciplinary problems, which are two of the main indicators for students at-risk of dropping out of school," Cunningham said.

Beauregard Parish has implemented a number of programs to help students relate their high school course work directly to skills that they can immediately use upon graduation.

“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 and encouraging students to stay on track for high school graduation,” she explained.

The Pharmacy Technician course and Industry Based Certifications like Microsoft Office Series (MOS), IC-3 (Computing Fundamentals, Key Applications, and Living Online), Outdoor Power Equipment Technology (OPET), and ServeSafe are among the choices students have that give them real-world training and experience.

Students in all Beauregard Parish high schools have the opportunity to take dual-enrollment courses with McNeese and Lamar Salter Technical College which give them Carnegie units toward high school graduation while allowing them to earn technical college or university credit toward a degree.

The STEPS (Senior Technical Education Program at Sowell) program at Sowell Technical College 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 and also preparing them with real-world skills in specific occupations. Twenty skills certifications are currently available in such areas as welder’s helper, small engine repair helper, librarian’s 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 concluded.