

Raising the Drop Out Age

In 1920, the Kentucky legislature decided the compulsory school attendance age should be set at 16 years old. A lot has changed in the past 93 years! Our job market has evolved to the point that most employers require employees to have at least a high school diploma or GED, and prefer employees to have some form of specialized training or higher education.

It is easy to conclude that dropping out of high school can lead a young person to have a very difficult time finding employment. There have been a number of studies and reports released that show high school dropouts, if they are employed, earn a wage substantially less than those who have a high school diploma. Those same studies also show that high school drop-outs are far more likely to be dependent on welfare programs or to end up incarcerated.

It is clear that a young person without a high school diploma will have a long, difficult road to travel in our current job market and society. When Governor Steve Beshear took office in 2007, he and First Lady Jane Beshear began a strong push to raise the compulsory age to 18. Recently, Gov. Beshear signed that measure into law, giving local Boards of Education the opportunity to raise their compulsory age.

Simpson County Schools operates on the belief that it is the responsibility of the school district to give each student the opportunity to have the best future possible. Therefore, the Simpson County Board of Education approved the policy revisions to raise the compulsory age in Simpson County from 16 to 18. Keeping students in school those extra two years gives them a better opportunity to have a successful future. This policy will take effect in two years beginning with the 2015-2016 school year.

Those who balk at the measure have concerns about forcing students who do not want to be in school to remain. Many are uneasy about the costs for alternative programs for those students. However, this new law will simply challenge us to be creative in providing the right opportunities for each of those students. In Simpson County Schools, we are already working to give our students reasons to stay in school and earn their diploma. District and school administrators have spent a lot of time listening to students and finding ways to meet their expectations for their educational experience. Since we believe that everyone learns differently, should we not look for different ways to provide a path toward a high school diploma? With that in mind, the Simpson County Board of Education approved the formation of Taskforce to study alternative education in our school system. The taskforce will consist of a broad range of stakeholders to help formulate a report and recommendations to the board to ensure we have the range of services needed at every level to help our students find success and graduate college and/or career ready.

In 2011-2012, Simpson County Schools dropout rate was 0.3% compared to the state average of 1.6%. The majority of our dropouts were already 18 years old. We are proud that our rate is extraordinarily low; however, our goal remains to have zero dropouts. We want all of our students to find value in the education they are receiving. Over the past several years, the district has implemented many initiatives to help students find their way to success. We have a robust continuum of services that support our students to help them find success. This continuum of services also ensures we have options that will limit disruptive students from interfering with the educational progress of others.

Obviously, we believe that changes to secondary education are necessary. Approaching education from a student-focused perspective is critical to individual success. This district is resolved to creatively meet the needs of all of our students so that they have every opportunity for a successful future. While we are proud of our efforts in the last several years, we know we have more work to do to ensure 100% of our students graduate academically and socially prepared for college, careers, and success in life. Working creatively and listening to our customers – our students and parents, we will achieve this vision.