



Spartanburg Area



CHAMBER FOCUS

Dropout Rate in SC Continues to Decline



South Carolinians should be proud to know more than 800 fewer students dropped out of Palmetto State high schools in 2010 than in 2009.

According to a recent report from the South Carolina Department of Education, the decrease during 2009-10 was the second consecutive year of improvement in reducing dropout numbers, with improvements in all demographic groups. Since 2007-08, South Carolina's total high school dropouts have decreased from 8,032 to 6,265, a 22 percent improvement.

Students who stay in school are not only helping create more promising futures

for themselves but also helping all South Carolinians prosper. Given the business community's need for a talented, capable workforce, having well-educated students means more companies will remain in South Carolina, and more businesses will choose to set up shop in the state.

With 85 percent of jobs now requiring education beyond high school, it's more important than ever to make sure our students realize the importance of staying in school.

South Carolina's economy will also benefit from this decrease in the dropout rate. Studies show that graduates have higher lifetime earnings. For students remaining in South Carolina, these earnings will go back into the state's economy.

The business community played a vital role in lowering the number of dropouts by

partnering with education leaders and the General Assembly in 2005 to pass the Education and Economic Development Act, now known as Personal Pathways to Success.

Personal Pathways gets students, their parents and their guidance counselors more involved in making the right educational choices by having students develop college and career goals based on their interests. By getting students to think more about their future and their post-high school plans early on, students are more likely to recognize the importance of doing well in high school in order to achieve their career goals.

While progress has been made, business leaders and educators must work closely with students to continue to lower the dropout rate. More attention must be given to students in their freshman and sophomore years, as approximately 27 percent of all dropouts that occurred in 2009-10 were in ninth grade, with 56 percent

of the dropouts having occurred by the tenth grade. Fortunately, there was a promising improvement, as 2,342 ninth-graders dropped out in 2007-08 compared to 1,691 ninth-graders dropping out in 2009-10.

In addition to lowering the dropout rank, the state's workers also received high marks in the workforce category of CNBC's America's Top States for Business 2011, landing at number six. Rankings like this and the decrease in the dropout rate prove we are moving in the right direction.

Business leaders and educators must continue working together to keep South Carolina competitive at the national level. Melody Birmingham-Byrd is Vice President-Southern Region for Progress Energy and chair of the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce Excellence in Education Council.

Upcoming Chamber Events

JIM THOMPSON'S ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Chapman Cultural Center
Thursday, September 8th
4:00pm-6:00pm

DIVERSITY CONNECTIONS Social Media Influence

City Range Steakhouse
Wednesday, September 14th
12:00pm-1:00pm

BUSINESS AFTER HOURS Jazz Under the Stars

The Haven at Oak Forest
Thursday, September 15th
5:30pm-7:00pm

BROWN BAG LUNCH Immigration Law and E-Verify

Spartanburg Area Chamber
Wednesday, September 21st
12:00pm-1:00pm

For more information on these and all Chamber events, visit spartanburgchamber.com.

JAZZ Under the Stars
9.15.2011
@The Haven at Oak Forest

NFL Star to Speak at M.E.D. Awards Celebration: Tuesday, October 25th

Levon Kirkland, who instilled fear into the hearts of quarterbacks around the NFL as a linebacker for the Pittsburgh Steelers, Seattle Seahawks and Philadelphia Eagles will be the keynote speaker for the Chamber's 2011 Minority Enterprise Development Awards Dinner presented by RR Donnelly.

Kirkland was a two-time MVP with the Steelers in 1998 and 1999, played in the Pro Bowl in 1996 and 1997, and was voted to the NFL All-Decade 1990's Team. As a player, he's tallied over 1000 tackles in his career, 19.5 sacks and 12 interceptions.

In 1996, as an alumni of Clemson University, Kirkland was named to his Alma Mater's All-Centennial team and was inducted into the University's Hall of Fame in 2001, followed by an induction into the South Carolina Athletic Hall of Fame in

2008.

After retiring from a very successful career in the NFL, Kirkland returned to Clemson University and completed his degree in Sociology in 2004. Today, he continues to work with Clemson, coordinating minority recruitment in their admissions office for the University. Kirkland educates student-athletes across the country on the college recruiting process as an Educational Speaker for the National Collegiate Scouting Association and lends his talents to Woodmont High School as a linebacker coach.

As a prime example of someone that utilizes their talents and notoriety for the betterment of Diversity and Minority interests, the Chamber's Diversity Committee is honored to have Kirkland as this year's keynote speaker. Minority Enterprise Development Awards Celebrations and Ban-

quets are held nationwide to recognize the contributions that minority business owners have made in our global economy.

The Spartanburg Area Chamber's celebration, like the national celebration, recognizes the accomplishments of the minority business men and women in our community.

"The numerous contributions of our diverse minority member businesses create opportunities of business growth and development today and for the future," says Rebecca West, the Chamber's Diversity Committee Event Chair.

During the evening, the 2011 Minority Advocate of the Year, the 2011 Minority Business Person of the Year, and the 2011 Rising Star Award (presented to an



area high school student) will be awarded.

Additional sponsors for this year's event include: Spartanburg Water, Hospice Care of South Carolina, Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System and Michelin North American, Inc.

Tickets are \$40 each. Register online by visiting the event calendar at www.spartanburgchamber.com. For sponsorship opportunities or more information, please contact Yvonne Harper, (864)594-5032 or email at yharper@spartanburgchamber.com

Business BUZZ



Check out this week's Chamber picks for the top three Upstate businesses with "tweets" you won't want to miss:

#1: @NeelysWindows

Neely's Windows Doors and More specializes in architecturally appropriate and energy efficient building materials. We feature products from Marvin Windows. <http://www.neelyswindows.com>

#2: @LRRCoffeeBar

Located in the historic Masonic Temple in downtown Spartanburg. Weekly Specials, Free Wifi, delicious treats from Cakehead Bakeshop. <http://www.littlerivercoffeebar.com>

#3: @BILOSuperSaver

We love offering you savings without sacrifice! We have #coupons and #specials just for you from BI-LO Grocery Store and Pharmacy. <http://www.bi-lo.com>

If you would like your business featured, follow us on Twitter: @SpartanChamber or email us at focus@spartanburgchamber.com.