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Yonkers groups discuss school dropouts

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YONKERS - Educators, parents and business leaders held a dropout-prevention summit yesterday to develop ideas for keeping students in school.

The event, co-hosted by Yonkers Partners in Education and the Yonkers City School District, sought promises from the 350 attendees that they would take steps to help children stay in school.

Superintendent of Schools Bernard Pierorazio noted that only 15 percent of the nation's jobs are available to unskilled workers. He also noted that the country's 50 biggest cities have an average high school graduation rate of just 53 percent.

The Yonkers district's graduation rate is 63 percent, and its dropout rate is 3 percent.

"Why are we doing this? Basically because we have no choice. We have to find solutions to keep students in school," he said, urging the audience to pitch in. "We must commit to pool our talents."

Keynote speaker Arthur Griffin, senior vice president of Urban Advisory Resource for McGraw-Hill Education, a provider of teaching materials, said that every day 7,000 children drop out of school in the United States. Griffin said all the school officials in attendance should adopt 15 strategies for dropout prevention, including early literacy, alternative schools and family engagement - practices already in place in the Yonkers public schools.

"We can't afford to lose any student if we want to retain our global competitiveness," Griffin said.

After Griffin's speech attendees broke into groups with high school students to brainstorm ideas on raising the district's graduation rate.

Pierorazio said yesterday's gathering at the Royal Regency Hotel on Tuckahoe Road was more than a pep talk because serious ideas emerged from previous events held by Yonkers Partners in Education. He noted that a college center that opened in November at Roosevelt High School with financial help from Yonkers Partners in Education was an idea that emerged from past brainstorming sessions.
