Dropping out hurts individual, society

By Sharon Hartin Iorio

Every day in Kansas, children leave school never to return. Overall, only about 75 percent of our nation’s students graduate high school, and that rate is about the same for Kansas.

Though most of us decry the loss, many of us also view dropping out of school as a personal choice -- one that will affect an individual’s life chances, but not a decision that will reach further than a single person or family.

Yet there are powerful, invisible effects of low graduation rates that influence the well-being of our society as a whole.

Our children are a rich national resource. In the 21st century, what we as individuals know and can do is as important as the value of industrial, agricultural or natural resources.

The true potential of children who drop out can never be measured, however, has been figured.

A student who drops out before finishing high school can expect to earn $9,200 less per year than high school graduates and about $1 million less over a lifetime compared with college graduates.

Recent research found high school dropout were more than three times more likely than college graduates to be unemployed.

Dropouts also are much more likely than their peers who graduate from high school to be unemployed, live in poverty, receive public assistance or go to prison. Moreover, the status of their overall health is also lower than those who complete high school.

High school graduates are more likely to engage in civic activity, including voting and volunteering in their communities.

Kansas and our country need all students to complete high school, and charitable organizations, public agencies and schools offer programs that will assist young people who are in danger of dropping out.

One of these is Kansas DropINs, a group affiliated with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and made up of more than 25 public and private agencies in Kansas devoted to dropout prevention. Kansas DropINs is organizing a one-day Kansas Dropout Prevention Summit open to the public on Tuesday, Oct. 20, in the Wichita State University Rhatigan Student Center. Visit the Web site www.kansasdropins.org to register.

The summit is funded through a grant received by the America’s Promise Alliance, a national organization, and corporate donations.

Civic structural support, like the summit, can offer assistance to interested individuals in the community, as well as families and friends who want to help...
young people to stay in
school.

Some of the ways to
help end the growing Kansas
dropout crisis:

- Provide assistance to
  families in need by donating
  food and clothing, or offering
  to help at a child care center.
- Help orient students
to the world of work by
  providing them a job or
  becoming a mentor.
- Serve as a classroom
  volunteer or provide other
  services to schools as needed.
- Advocate for schools
  within the community and at
  the state and national levels,
  to initiate and lead reform.

Fully 25 percent of
the potential of our state’s
youths is vanishing because
of students who drop out of
school. Who can know what
potential talent could be
developed – what the future
might bring – should that 25
percent stay the course
through high school
graduation or beyond?

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